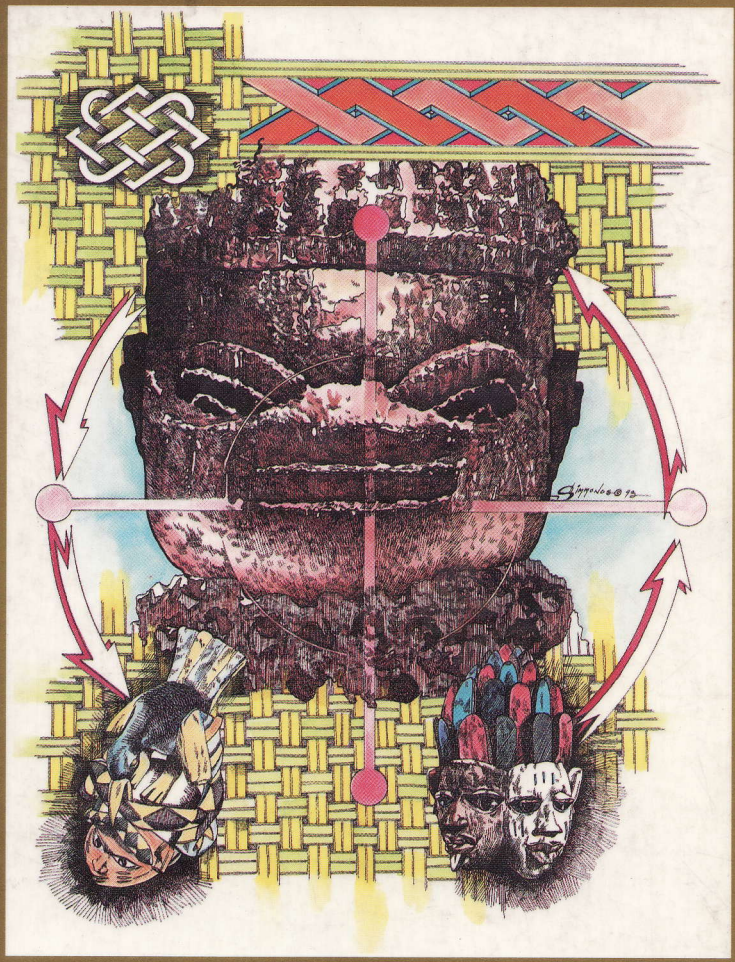
The HANDBOOK of Yoruba Religious Concepts



Baba Ifa Karade

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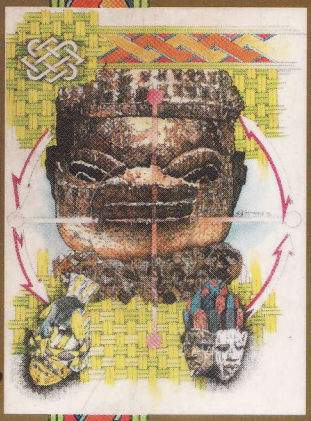

In this introductory volume, Baba Ifa Karade provides an easily understandable overview of the Yoruba religion. He describes 16 orisha—angelic forces that reside in the natural world and assist us in our endeavors—and offers comparable teachings from the scriptures of other religions so that we can quickly grasp the teachings of each orisha. Karade shows us how to work with divination, to use the chakras to internalize the teachings of Yoruba, and describes how to create a sacred place of worship. Prayers, dances, songs, offerings, and sacrifices to honor the orisha and egun (ancestral entities) are also explained. Karade spent time in Africa studying his ancestral roots, and returned to America to pursue the Yoruba tradition. This book is the result of his study.

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Cover painting is "Adura" by Oswald Simmonds

The H◇A◇N◇D◇B◇O◇O◇K of Yoruba Religious Concepts

Baba Ifa Karade

SAMUEL WEISER, INC.

York Beach, Maine

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To Oludumare, Orunmila, the Orisha, and the Egun.

To the elders of Ile Iya Olorisha in Ejigbo, Nigeria, Africa. Special appreciation to Chief Araba Malomo and Iya Keye (now an ancestor) for initiating me into the priestly order.

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A Note to Readers

Whenever cultures interface, either through conquest or through peaceful assimilation, the dominant cultural religious structure will extract the more positive aspects of the subjugated culture. What is left in its wake are the negative aspects. "Sub-cultural" people accept this negativity because it is the part of the origin or tradition that is presented by the dominant culture. For example, in respect to the Yoruba religious practice, what is left is the negative "voodoo—roots" mentality. This "voodoo mentality" is devoid of the sacred realities born of African thought in respect to religion, philosophy, and dignity.

New world descendants of the Yoruba culture are beginning to research the origins of their faith with focused intensity. It is becoming quite apparent that the negativity that we are subjected to is but a mere shadow of the greatness of our vast West African tradition.

Those seeking their traditional heritage eventually face the spirituality of their ancestors. When this facing occurs, a deep psychological rift is formed. On the one side is the societal dominant religious structure; on the other side, the infinite ancestral structure. Adherents to the ancestral Yoruba must be aware of the dangers of crossing this rift. Spiritual enlightenment, deep study, and gradual acceptance will provide the courage and strength needed to make the mighty leap through the negativity and across the abyss.

—Baba Ifa Karade

Introduction

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

TO RE-INVESTIGATE the African cultural structure is to reawaken and strengthen the African conceptual consciousness. In respect to religion, concepts are philosophical and transcendental aspects of developmental sciences. They are the fundamental ethos and world-views of a people. To be able to conceptualize is one of the higher orders of thinking which inevitably leads a person or people to a greater logic. What is conceived, or born from this logic is that oneness with the Creative Essence brings about a wholeness in the potential of the human essence. The tenets of Yoruba-African religious thought revolve around this.

The understandings which lead to the acceptance and the actualization of logic in spiritual development are often defined as mystical. The major error of many seeking the traditional Yoruba faith is that they confuse mysticism with occultism. "Mystical searching has no relation whatsoever in aim or means to phenomena or powers known as occult. . . . The aim of man's mystical search is to acquire an imperishable consciousness through a progressive communion of his physical body (his temporal reality), with his spiritual being (his immortal reality), and his 'kinship' with his divine cause."[1]

The Yoruba religion is different in the Old World of Nigeria, West Africa than in the New World of the Americas. The difference is that the basic fundamental concepts

[1] Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, *Her-Bak: Egyptian Initiate* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1978), p. 369.

have been largely misinterpreted in the New World. The mysticism has been overshadowed by the occultism. Basic misconceptions result from this. In the Old World it has not been forgotten that the aim of the mystic or priestly orders is not to dwell upon occult powers but to seek the divine essence. From a conceptual standpoint this is all-pervasive and all-important. Seekers, or aspirants of the Yoruba religion, need to be constantly reminded, as reiterated throughout the book, that Yoruba is not a cult nor is it "occult." Yoruba is a divine journey to the inner self and to God-Consciousness. Yoruba is a religion.

"The indigenous Yoruba has a belief in the existence of a self-existent being who is believed to be responsible for the creation and maintenance of heaven and earth, of men and women, and who also brought into being divinities and spirits who are believed to be his functionaries in the theocratic world as well as intermediaries between mankind and the self-existent Being."[2] The Yoruba word for God is both Oludumare and Olorun. There is no doubt that the African conceived the One God theosophy eons before external foreign influence.

In regard to traditional systems in general—and specifically in Yoruba religion—it is said that they are pagan and heathenistic. Clearly, the absurdity of such views are relative to the lack of spiritual-religious substance of those who hold them. To say that one religion is pagan is to say that they are all pagan. Inscribed within the very scriptures of religious cultures throughout the world there exist variants and strata of substantial recognition of insubstantial forms of feelings, thought processes, supernatural beings, transcendental worlds, and forces that direct the creation and destruction of all things.

These forms materialize as structural tangible objects shaped by the culture that expresses them. Statues, symbolic religious artistic creations, and sacred physical positions, all demonstrate the human need and ability to make concrete the multiplicity of realities that exist within the universe.

[2] Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (White Plains, NY: Longman Group, 1979), p. 3.

Those beings which are deemed angels by western definition are known to the Yoruba as orisha. The aspirant is directed to see the orisha as emanations of the One Source or Oludumare. The orisha are not simply mythological constructions designed to satisfy the lower mind and intent of humans. As "angels" in all religious context they (the orisha) were created and sent by Oludumare to assist in the spiritual evolution of humankind.

"In the Judeo-Christian culture, the word for angels signifies their work as messengers, but other words for angels signify their essence. They are called gods, the sons of gods, ministers, servants, watchers, the holy ones. They constitute the court of Heaven."[3] Although the Judeo-Christian emphasis is clear, it need be fully realized that concepts of angels existed long before their arrival. For example, the Yoruba concept of ancestors and orisha as messengers of Oludumare were in effect thousands of years prior to Judeo-Christianity. Native people throughout the world speak of being shown rituals by holy messengers and of being shown how to farm and domesticate animals. Ancient peoples of all world cultures depict angelic beings as seen through their cultural eyes. They were helpers in the survival and the raising of their nations.

The reality of angelic forces is based on faith and conviction. In the Yoruba religious system one must believe in the orisha in order to ascend to God-Consciousness—in order to reach the divine state of human being. Yet, a disruption of this endeavor has been brought about by Christian and Islamic influences. Burnham states, "Islamic angels fell after the creation of humans, but Christian angels fell

[3] Sophy Burham, *A Book of Angels* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), p. 82.

before the creation of the human race."[4] The importance here is that Yoruba angels, never fell in respect to divine grace.

Religious doctrines that no longer hold angelic influence as a major part of divine intervention are apt to downplay and also corrupt the spiritual insights of those religious doctrines that do. Aspirants of the Yoruba religion need understand that different basic concepts of cultural-religious structures give rise to great misunderstandings and misdirection. The supreme purpose of this book is to prevent such from occurring.

[4] *A Book of Angels*, p. 140.

THE HANDBOOK OF YORUBA RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

Chapter 1

THE YORUBA HISTORY

IN ORDER TO STUDY the religious and cultural definitions of the Yoruba it is important to be somewhat versed in the historical conditions that gave birth to them. Students or aspirants of any religious system are guided by the priestly order and teachers of that system. They are educated in the geographical and political dynamics which clearly have influenced the beginnings and the expansion of their religion. The same holds true for Yoruba aspirants—especially the New World descendants. Although the aspirants seek religious heritage, as well as ancestral origins, many know little or nothing of the history of Yorubaland in Nigeria, West Africa.

As an introduction to this area let it be stated that the origins of the people and culture known as Yoruba are so wrapped in antiquity that to exactly say where and when it all began is impossible. However, the sincere attempt to present a viable description will be undertaken.

The Yoruba history begins with the migration of an East African population across the trans-African route leading from the mid-Nile river area to the mid-Niger. Basil Davidson writes, ". . . . migrating peoples undoubtedly used this route from times that were exceedingly remote . . . that two thousand years ago and more the climate and vegetation would have treated trans-African travelers in a gentler way than they do now."[1] Davidson continues, ". . . they came this

[1] Basil Davidson, *The Lost Cities of Africa* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1959), p. 60.

way [the route] from the earliest of times; and their beliefs and their inventions came with them."[2]

Archaeologists, according to M. Omoleya, inform us that the Nigerian region was inhabited more than forty thousand years ago, or as far back as 65,000 B.C.[3] This civilization has been deemed, in part, the Nok culture. The Nok culture was visited by the "Yoruba group," between 2000 and 500 B.C. The group was led, according to Yoruba historical accounts, by King Oduduwa, who settled somewhat peacefully in the already established Ile-Ife—the sacred city of the indigenous people. This time period is known as the Bronze Age, indicating that the civilization of both groups were at relatively high levels.

Olumide J. Lucus proclaims, "The Yoruba, during antiquity, lived in ancient Egypt before migrating to the Atlantic coast. He uses as demonstration the similarity or identity of languages, religious beliefs, customs and names of persons, places and things."[4] The key point, or focus, in respect to Yoruba religious evolution, is that the Egyptian order, coupled with the earlier peoples, produced the more defined statement of what makes Yoruba.

In the *History of West Africa A.D. 1000-8000*, Onwubiko states that, "According to tradition, Oduduwa, the chief ancestor and first king of the Yoruba settled at Ile-Ife. From this point his descendants became the kings and queens of Yoruba cities and territories."[5] The greatest of Oduduwa's descendants was Oranmiyan who became the Alafin or ruler of the Oyo state somewhere around 1400 A.D. Oranmiyan's armies marched across the Southern Sudan and penetrated deep into the great tropical forest conquering

[2] *The Lost Cities of Africa*, p. 60.
[3] Michael Omoleya, *Certificate History of Nigeria* (London & Lagos: Longman Group, 1986), p. 15.
[4] Cheik Anta Dio, *Precolonial Black Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, co-published with Lawrence Hill, 1992), p. 216.
[5] Onwubiko, KBC, *History of West Africa A.D. 1000–8000* (Onitsha, Nigeria: Africana-FEP Publisher, 1967), p. 134–135.

and laying the foundations of the Yoruba Empire. Centuries of spectacular glory and achievement followed the reign of Oranmiyan. It was during this great era that Yoruba people re-established Ile-Ife as the sacred-spiritual capital and Oyo as the governmental seat.

The Enslavement Period

Onwubiko's research indicates that "the wars of expansion (amongst the Yoruba) during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not fought to procure slaves for export to the coast but for local service on Yoruba farms. It was not until the eighteenth century that wars to provide slaves for sale to Europeans became important."[6]

Enslavement from European hands began in the 15th and 16th centuries. Around 1530 A.D., the Portuguese began to transport Africans from the West Coast to Spanish mines and plantations in the New World. Later, other European nations became involved. France, England, Holland, and Spain were all very active in the brutal manipulation and deception that somehow became known as the "slave trade."

Islamic jihads (holy wars), incited by Arabic religious fervor, also swept through Africa clear to the western coastal regions. This era lasted from about A.D. 641 through the 19th century. The trans-Saharan slave trade flourished. The Yoruba Nation, now devastated and depleted of its most natural resource—people—eventually collapsed.

It is important to note that the greatest percentage of Africans enslaved for New World labor came from the Yoruba nation. It is also important to note that a large percentage of those enslaved were war-political prisoners of elite classes of soldiers and warrior-priests. As a result, the New World became inundated with a people knowledgeable of their culture and who were initiated members of its

[6] *History of West Africa*, p. 136.

higher teachings. It is of no small wonder that Yoruba culture became the dominant theme of African-American transference.

African descendants were transported to New World countries like Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad, Jamaica, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and other islands of the West Indies; to Brazil, Argentina, and Venezuela in South America; and finally to the colonies and states of North America.

The crossing of the Atlantic Ocean to reach these destinations has been deemed The Middle Passage or the Triangle Trade. Three ports were involved; one was in Nigeria, the other in the West Indies, the other in Europe. It has been estimated that over 75 million captives were taken during the four or five centuries we call the enslavement period.

When Europeans arrived on African soil, the Judeo-Christian missionary zeal was planted as it would be later on American soil. Conversion of Africans to Christianity in spite of enslavement continued. The other side of the reality is that African people were solidly encased in the religion of their own culture and the zeal to implant it also existed—especially among the Yoruba. Maureen Warner-Lewis in her book, *Guinea's Other Suns*, quotes a study from Mobogunji and Omer-Cooper 1971-1977, "The fact that the Yoruba were dragged into the slave trade in such huge numbers and so soon before the trade was brought to an end had several important consequences . . . . Their culture and religion tended to dominate the sub-culture of the slave society and to submerge and absorb into itself surviving elements of African culture."[7]

There also came into being a type of homogenization or synthesis of the religions. From the African perspective there arose a special Christian interpretation based on African spirituality and practice. Warner-Lewis continues that: "Some [Africans] denounced the traditional gods; others did not even credit their existence. On the other hand, a large number maintained traditional beliefs and practices alongside Christianity, using one spiritual resource to supplement and complement the other."[8] For a people stripped of their fundamental social structures and mores, the concepts of spirit and religion have miraculously survived. The African maintained the "Africanness" of religious being through spirituals; getting the holy ghost (a form of possession); shouting; speaking in tongues; intense preaching, etc. In general, the African soul was not extinguished, but simply transfigured to meet the Euro-social pressures under New World bondage.

[7] Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Guinea's Other Suns* (Dover, MA: The Majority Press, 1991), p. 1.

Robert Farris Thompson writes in his introduction to *Flash of the Spirit* that, "The Yoruba are black Africa's largest population, and are creators of one of the premier cultures of the world. The Yoruba believe themselves descended from goddesses and gods, from an ancient spiritual capital, Ile-Ife. They show their special concern for the proprieties of right living through their worship of major goddesses and gods, each essentially a unique manifestation of ashe . . . only the most widely and important (deities) survived the vicissitudes of the Atlantic Trade."[9]

These important deities bear the name of orisha, which are the angelic forces of Yoruba context. Among them are Eshu-Elegba, Obatala, Oshun, Ogun, Yemoja, Shango, Oya, and others too numerable to mention. Each require special worship, song, and sacrifice. The ability to keep these deities alive in the world-reality of the Yoruba led to the conscious masking of them behind Christian saints and social-ritual performances. Catholicism, with its numerous patron-saints, made the masking easy. And, since the Portuguese and Spanish were Catholic and also major enslavers of Yoruba elite prisoners, the tradition survived virtually intact.

[8] *Guinea's Other Suns*, p. 51.

[9] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), p. xv.

Among the Euro-speaking colonies, religious sects known as Santeria in Puerto Rico, Candomble in Brazil, Shango in Trinidad, Voodun in Haiti, and Lucumi in Cuba were formed. The Euro-influences, although great, could not deter the African descendants from secretly maintaining their tradition. Even the language of the Yoruba remained, as did cultural mannerisms.

English Protestants, also involved in the slave era, had greater success in "domesticating" the African. Lack of numerous patron saints in the religious construct made it difficult to mask the Yoruba religion. Lack of tropical environments in North America made it difficult for the African to maintain cultural relativity. Finally, the emphasis on inbreeding the African-American slaves brought an end to fresh ideas and religious fervor from newly arrived enslaved prisoners.

Today, many of Africa's descendants are openly embracing the Yoruba faith and practice. Because of political struggles, especially in the 1950s, New World people from the Caribbean found their way to the United States. They were mainly from Cuba, which is often called "little Africa." The Cubans brought with them the Yoruba religion and practice as they had interpreted it. Now, African descendants in the Americas are stepping beyond the Hispanic interpretations, and are returning to the more unadulterated form of life and ancestral religion known as Yoruba. Serious aspirants of this religious movement have connected themselves with Nigerian influenced high-priests, known as babalawos, who now reside in the United States.

Chapter 2

ORUNMILA AND THE IFA CORPUS

ORUNMILA is deemed the prophet of Yoruba religion and culture. It was he who developed and expounded upon the system of esoteric worship known to this day as Ifa. Through the study of human nature and divine nature, Orunmila saw that dual levels of potentiality existed. Through him we understand that the study of animate and inanimate, manifest and unmanifest, visible and invisible worlds leads to fundamental understandings of the self-ontology, and that these fundamental understandings bring about the evolution of human spirit, which, in turn, encourages divine behavior, worldly progression, and expanded cosmology.

Orunmila, as with all prophets, is a deified personage who has been elevated to a central point in the creative origin of life itself. According to Yoruba religion, Orunmila is said to hold a position comparable to the "son of God." He is said to have been present (in conscious-divine form) when Oludumare created all beings. Hence, he knows the truth of all beings, and too, the destiny of all beings.

Of all the Yoruba divinities, Orunmila is the most esoteric. He acts and speaks, yet has no physical form. There are no sculptured reflections of Orunmila himself. All references of him are expressed through the divinatory implements utilized by the priestly order dedicated to his teachings. Those of this sacerdotal order are known as Ifa Priests or *babalawos*, meaning "father of mysteries." Yet, Orunmila did actually exist.

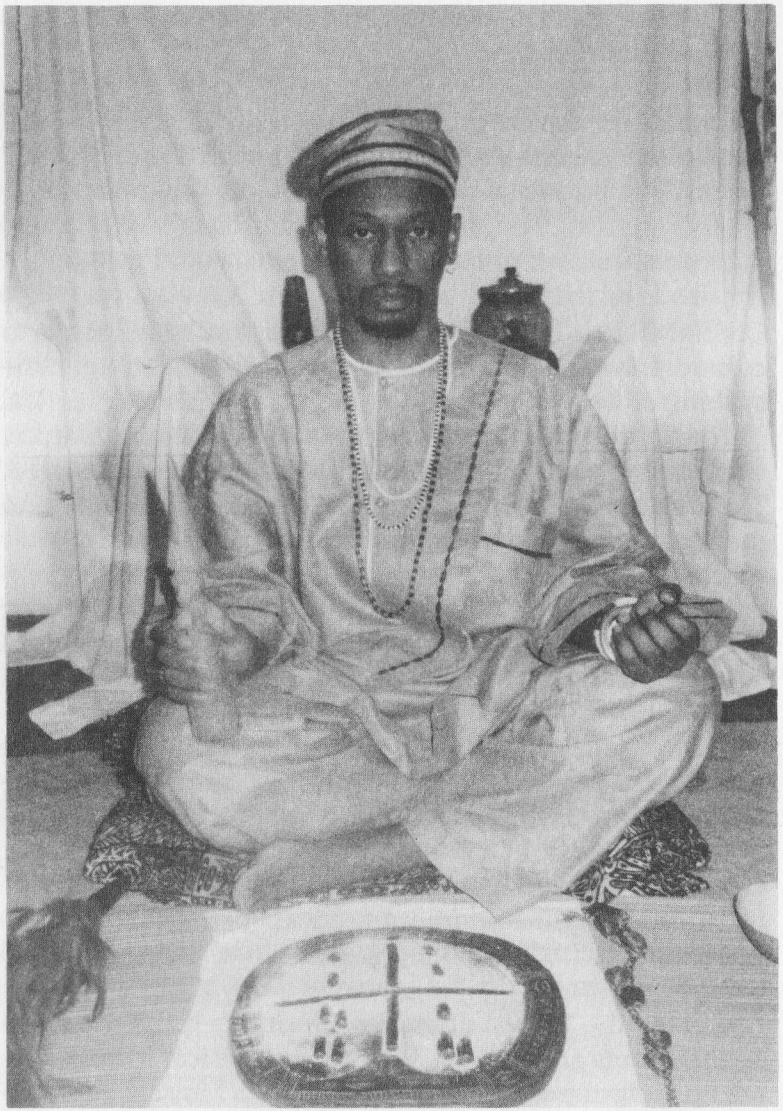

Figure 1. Baba Ifa Karade, chief and high priest, prepares to recite the Odu marked on the Opon-Ifa. He holds the iroke (diviner's tapper) in his right hand. The tapper is struck rhythmically upon the Opon-Ifa as initial prayers are made to Orunmila.

Orunmila's physical origins are shrouded in ancient legend, however, it is believed that he was born of humble West African parents. To the people of the land he was clearly recognized as a divine child, and although poor and crippled, he expressed from the onset divine wisdom and attributes. Orunmila grew to be known as "the little man with the big head." His great intelligence superseded all known teachings and his divine nature was seen as a blessing of the angelic forces.

As Orunmila matured he traveled across the continent of Africa sharing wisdom with the prophets and sages of the land. There is evidence of Orunmila's influence in ancient Khamet/Egypt, and too, in the Essence community of the Judeo-pre-Christian era. Yet, the potency of Orunmila's teachings were directed to the Yoruba people centered around the city of Ile-Ife. It was here, in Ile-Ife, that Orunmila built his temple on the sacred hill called Oke Tase. It was here in Ile-Ife that Orunmila gained heavenly status. In the translation of his name is the meaning "only Heaven knows the way to salvation," clearly indicating his prophet-messianic status among those who believe in his being.

According to oral tradition, Orunmila is described as a Yoruba man who came to Ile-Ife in order to teach a system of ethics, religious belief, and mystic vision. It must be reinforced, however, that Orunmila, as all prophets, merely assessed and delivered systems of conscious evolution by means of life study—ritual and spiritual-heavenly beliefs that existed eons before his birth. The elders of Ifa maintain that they are practicing the original religion of humans on Earth.

Orunmila, in this sense, is not seen as the creator of Yoruba religion per se. However, Orunmila is the structural originator. He is the focal point of ancient religious practice for this era of human existence. The exact time frame of his presence on Earth is difficult to determine. To place his worldly existence at about 4,000 years ago or 2,000 B.C. is but an approximation.

The teachings of Orunmila provide religious aspirants with the means and potential to reach what is called, in Yoruba translation, alignment. By studying the Ifa corpus (the once oral scriptures passed from one priestly generation to the next), devotees strive to reach a state of divine oneness. That oneness comes about when one's earthly consciousness (known as Ori) is developed and elevated to the place of unification with one's heavenly consciousness (known as Iponri). Orunmila teaches that such an endeavor is arduous, difficult, and takes years of soul searching and effort. Those who embark on the journey (irin ajo) need do so with a pure heart, and with sincerity, for although the attainment is glorious, the pitfalls are horribly devastating.

Wisdom, ritual, and transcendence are the key elements of Orunmila's teachings and they are bound by African cultural interpretation. There is no difference here in light of all world religions. Destiny, however, brings about deeper thought. What is our destiny? What is *your* destiny? It is important to somewhat determine this before setting out to reach it.

Destiny (ayanmo), from a religious point of view, describes a person's return to the inner realization of primal essence or divine being. Orunmila, as all true prophets, preached that humans must return to their divine nature. It is a human being's destiny to reach or return to her/his divine state internally-heavenly, and to live upon the earth plane-existence as a reflection of that divine state. This is the supreme reason for true religious involvement.

Orunmila continues in his religious corpus known as Ifa that one's destiny can only be reached through :

a. the divinatory processes left to us by the ancestors;

b. prescriptions of ritual and sacrifice to the spiritual dimensional beings whose forces impact upon human development and evolution;

c. the moral ethics to which humans must adhere in order to be victorious over oppressive human and spiritual forces.

The Ancients/Elders, who are the Ifa corpus, are known in total as the odu. The odu are comprised of sixteen heavenly prophets who existed when the earth was very young. Sent to earth by the Heavenly Council they imparted their divine essence and prophesized. They relied on both heavenly (Orun) and earthly (Aye) life experiences so as to relate to and then elevate the consciousness of the people. These sixteen ancients revealed themselves to Orunmila and are now said to be his heavenly disciples from a timeless cosmic eternity.

Each of the odu represents the epitome of Yoruba proverbial wisdom and religiosity. Each contains an enormous amount of verses (ese) and moral teachings (kiki) expressed through mythological, historical, and social development (itan) as seen through religious eyes. The priestly of Yoruba are set to learn and apply the knowledge and wisdom of the odu so as to present ways of transcendence and salvation to spiritual seekers. Each of the 16 major odu (Oju odu or Ol odu) and the 240 Omo odu or Amulu is said to contain 1,680 verses making such an endeavor a great one. And, although no one priest is said to be able to reach such a degree, the objective is to continually strive for greater insight and understanding.

Orunmila was able to reach the conscious height of the odu and thereby reveal the holy messages that they embody. The ability to achieve this state is manifested in the ability to divine. Each odu has its own mark-pattern and its own accounts, rituals, ethics, and morals. Within each odu there exist revelations of the angelic and oppressive forces known as orisha and ajogun respectively. The orisha are angels of heaven sent to continually wrestle with the human nature in order to uplift it—to purify it. The ajogun are the "demonic" beings. They are warlocks, wizards, witches, and all earthly and heavenly forces whose destructive intent

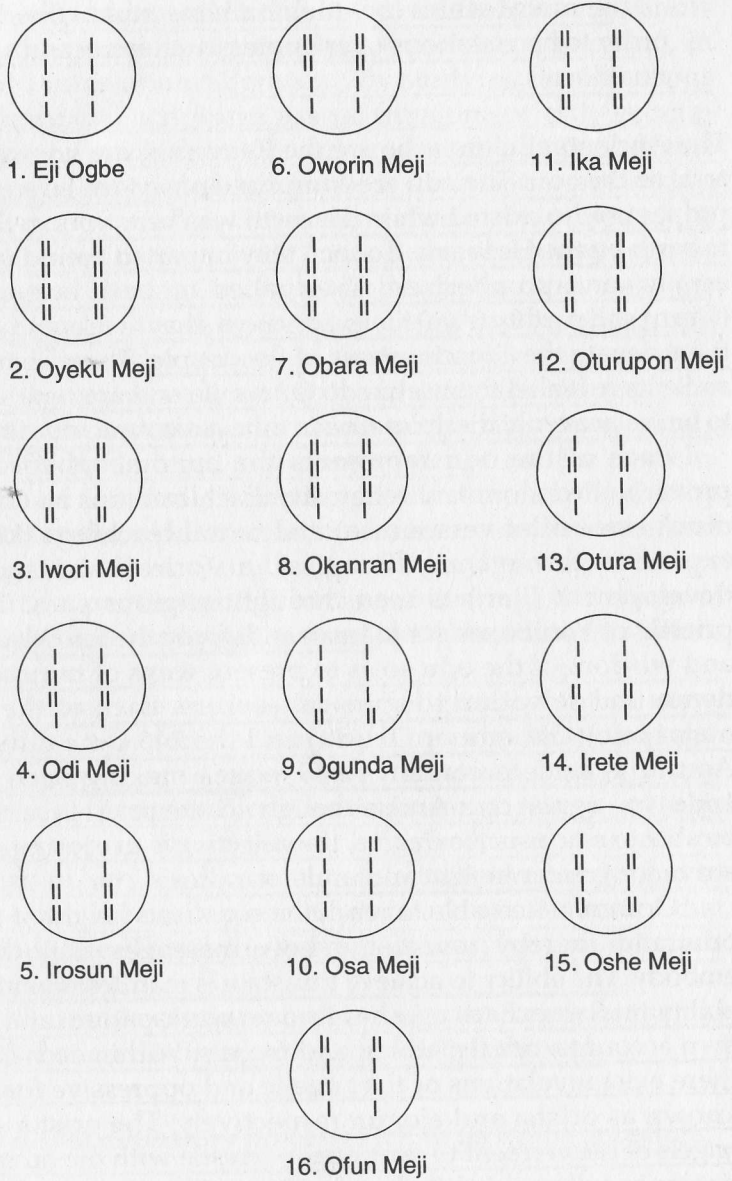

Figure 2. The Sixteen Major Odu (Oju Odu) and their Pattern.

is to waylay evolution and off-set humankind's salvation. The ancestral entities (egun) also dwell within the realm of Ifa. It is they who are the guardian spirits whose directives are to provide the continuation of family line, heritage, and identity as a people united. It is they who have made the history, and have set the codes of social conduct and individual behavior.

To experience divination in the Yoruba context is to experience the core essence of Yoruba philosophy and worship. Unfortunately, divination is too often related to "getting a reading," which belittles and berates the sacred act. Psychics can "read" a person, but religiosity is not required. In order to approach Ifa divination religiosity must be present. Only through the priestly initiated should Ifa be summoned.

It is through the processes of divination that seekers come to know of themselves and the forces that are shaping their past, present, and future lives. Through the process of divination seekers come to understand the need for alignment with their most heavenly of selves and how to overcome the opposing forces that disrupt their efforts. Study, interpretation, reflection, and refinement of the psychological and spiritual selves are foremost as novices undertake the austerities of Orunmila's teachings.

Figure 2 depicts the sixteen odu patterns as distinguished by marks of (I) for light-open and (II) for dark-closed. In Table 1 on pages 14–20, the odu are represented along with one of the verses / moral codes. Other world-religious teachings are added comparatively so that novices will not be constricted in their thinking. It must be constantly reinforced that Yoruba is of a religious world-order. The revelations of Orunmila need be open to all, yet the priestly functions of divination and sacrifice need be maintained by the initiated only.

Table 1. Odu Ethics.

PATH	OGBE
IFA	Those who attain blessings are those who live by their wisdom; only fools know not how to direct their lives. If we do not bear suffering that will fill a basket; we will not receive blessings that will fill a cup. Act not in heat nor haste for you may miss the good things that come in the evening of life.
BIBLICAL	The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of the transgressors shall destroy them (*Proverbs 11:3*).
ORIENTAL WISDOM	The superior person is quiet and calm, awaiting for the appointments of Heaven. The common person walks in dangerous paths looking for lucky occurrences (*Doctrine of the Mean*).
QUR'AN	Oh my son! Establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong. And bare with patient constancy what'er betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in (the conduct of) affairs (*Sura 31:17*).
The HUSIA-KHEMET	Those who are blameless in matters of conduct, no words can prevail against them. And those who are self-mastered, the harsh are kinder to them than their own mothers; and all people become their servants. Let your name go forth, then while you yourself are silent you will be recognized and respected (Kagemni).
AFRICAN PROVERB	The heart of the wise lay quiet like the peaceful waters (*Cameroon*).
PATH	**OYEKU**
IFA	The prevalence of temper outburst and cursing are the causes of difficulty in one's life.
BIBLICAL	Who so diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him (*Proverbs 26:27*). Who so causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit; but the upright shall have good things in possession (*Proverbs 28:10*).

Table 1. Odu Ethics (continued).

QUR'AN	For God loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious, (nor) those who are vile or enjoin vileness on others . . . for we have prepared for those who resist faith, a punishment that steeps them to contempt (*Sura 4:36, 37*).
AFRICAN PROVERB	Ashes fly back into the face of he who throws them. (*Niger*).
PATH	**IWORI**
IFA	Your children will be raised under much hardship. However, you should continuously persevere in respect to their correct upbringing.
BIBLICAL	Train up a child in the way they should go; and when they are old they will not depart from it (the training) (*Proverbs 22:6*).
ORIENTAL WISDOM	Teach your sons (children) so that the straight forward may yet be mild, the gentle may yet be dignified, the strong not tyrannical, and the impetuous not arrogant (*Menicus*).
KHEMETIAN	If you are parents of worth and wisdom, train your children so that they may be pleasing to God . . . but, if they fail to follow your course, oppose your will, reject all counsel and set their mouth in motion with vile words, then drive them away (*Ptah Hotep*).
PATH	**ODI**
IFA	It is a grave tragedy to die young so we pray, "May we be sufficiently ripe before we are eaten up by death; and we seek by all means to attain long life."
BIBLICAL	The fear of the Lord prolongeth days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened (*Proverbs 10:27*). Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish; why shouldest thou die before thy time (*Ecclesiastes 7:16-17*)?

Table 1. Odu Ethics (continued).

The HUSIA-KHEMET	Be diligent as long as you live, always doing more than is commanded of you. Do not misuse your time while following the heart, for it is offensive to the soul to waste one's time. Do not lose the daily opportunity to increase that which you have (*Pta-Hotep*).
AFRICAN PROVERB	Poverty is slavery (*Somalia*).
PATH	**OKANRAN**
IFA	One must come to realize that stubbornness is not beneficial; that the truth regarding oneself must be listened to. Do not be overly influenced by your self-defensive ego. Problems in life are caused by negligence of one's self.
BIBLICAL	Every way of a man is right in his own eyes; but the Lord pondereth the hearts (*Proverbs 21:2*).
ORIENTAL WISDOM	In archery we have something of the superior person. When the archer misses the center of the target, he turns around and seeks the cause of his failure in himself (*Doctrine of the Mean*).
The HUSIA-KHEMET	Guard against words and deeds of deception and against words that are not true. Destroy the desire to do and speak evil within you, for the evil person hath no rest (*Ani*).
PATH	**OGUNDA**
IFA	Anger does not do anything for anyone; patience is the father of good character; those who develop patience will enjoy long life.
The HUSIA-KHEMET	. . . Be gentle and patient, then your character will be beautiful. It is in the development of character that instruction succeeds. Learn the structure and functioning of the Sky. Learn the structure and functioning of the Earth (*Ankhsheshonqi*).
AFRICAN PROVERB	A little subtleness is better than a lot of force (*Zaire*).

PATH	IROSUN
IFA	Seek the place of honor, respect, and accomplishment in this world; for you will become a revered ancestor.
The HUSIA-KHEMET	Every person teaches as they act. They will speak to the children so that they will speak to their children. Each person will set an example and not give offense (*Ptah Hotep*). Follow the footsteps of your ancestors, for the mind is trained through knowledge. Behold their words, endure in books (*Kheti*). Pour libation for your father and mother who rest in the valley of the dead. God will witness your action and accept it . . . for as you do for your parents, your children will do for you also (*Ani*).
PATH	**OWORIN**
IFA	To be told and to like it; to be given advise and to accept it; to take advise in order to know what the world is like.
BIBLICAL	Hear counsel and receive instruction that thou mayest be wise in the latter end (*Proverbs 19:20*).
AFRICAN PROVERB	Advise and counsel them; if they do not learn, let adversity teach them (*Ethiopia*).
PATH	**OBARA**
IFA	One must be uplifted from poverty-stricken acceptance and state of mind. There is no virtue in being in poverty. Be industrious and accomplish your desires. Wealth will come.
BIBLICAL	Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread (*Proverbs 20:13*).

Table 1. Odu Ethics (continued).

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AFRICAN PROVERB	A little subtleness is better than a lot of force (*Zaire*).

Table 1. Odu Ethics (continued).

PATH	OSA
IFA	One must cease leading themselves to misfortune. One must cease bringing harm upon themselves.
The HUSIA-KHEMET	Gentleness of conduct of every kind causes the wise to be praised. Do not make your mouth harsh or speak loudly with your tongue. For a loud voice does damage to members of the body just like an illness. Do not be so impatient when you ask that you get angry while you are listening. . . . Do not yield often to your tongue in order to advise when you have not been asked (*Phebhor*).
PATH	**IKA**
IFA	It is to be that Ifa divination be continually performed so that the forces in one's life be understood and controlled.
BIBLICAL	Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For thou art with me; thy rod and staff thy comfort me (*Psalms 23:4*).
ORIENTAL WISDOM	Those who are skillful in managing life entrusted to them may travel on the land without fear . . . for within there is no place of death (*Lao Tzu*).
PATH	**OTURUPON**
IFA	The Orisha state that we must never raise problems or incite conflict. That we must take the time to be sure of our words even before we speak.
BIBLICAL	A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger (*Proverbs 15:1*). The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouths of fools poureth out foolishness (*Proverbs 15:2*).
QUR'AN	And be moderate in thy pace, and lower thy voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass (*Sura 31:19*).

Table 1. Odu Ethics (continued).

The HUSIA-KHEMET	. . . offensive words that come from your mouth, if repeated, can make bitter enemies. A person may be ruined by his or her tongue. Take care and you will fare well . . . a harsh answer provokes strife, but one who speaks with gentleness is loved (*Ani*).
AFRICAN PROVERB	Do not say the first thing that comes to your mind (*Guinea*). If your mouth turns into a knife it will cut off your lips (*Zimbabwe*).
PATH	**OTURA**
IFA	No matter how powerful wickedness is; righteousness overcomes it in the end. The power of falsehood is transient and ephemeral; truth although seemingly slow and weak overcomes falsehood in the end.
BIBLICAL	The eye of the truth shall be established forever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment (*Proverbs 12:19*).
ORIENTAL WISDOM	Though the white gem be cast into the dirt, its purity cannot long be sullied; though the good man live in a vile place, his heart cannot be depraved. As the fir and the cypress withstand the rigors of winter, so resplendent wisdom is safe in situations of difficulty and danger (*Wisdom of Kung Fu*).
AFRICAN PROVERB	The truth is like gold, keep it locked up and you will find it exactly as you first put it away (*Senegal*).
PATH	**IRETE**
IFA	Guard against selfishness; those who are selfish will come to bare their burdens alone.
BIBLICAL	Who stoppeth his ears at the crying of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard (*Proverbs 21:13*).
QUR'AN	Those who (in charity) spend of their goods by night and by day, in secret and in public, have their reward with their lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve (*Sura 2:274*).

Table 1. Odu Ethics (continued).

KHEMETIAN	Help your friends with things you have, for you have these things by the grace of God. If you fail to help your friends, one will say you have a selfish Ka (*Pta Hotep*). Eat not bread while another stands by hungry without extending your hand to him or her. As for food, it is always here, it is a man or a woman who do not remain . . . one who was rich last year may be vagrant this year. Therefore, be not anxious to fill your belly without regards for others (*Ani*).
PATH	OSHE
IFA	Unless we resort to caution and discretion we will miss the blessings of prosperity.
BIBLICAL	Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy (*Proverbs 27:4*).
ORIENTAL WISDOM	You may do good without thinking about fame, but fame will come to you nevertheless. You may have fame without aiming at riches, but riches are sure to follow in its wake. You may be rich without wishing to provoke emulation and strife, yet emulation and strife will certainly result. Hence, the superior persons are very cautious about how they do good (*Lieh Tzu*).
PATH	OFUN
IFA	Do not speak of those who are ill of mind or crippled of body. Do not leave your home and speak badly of those in trouble.
BIBLICAL	Whoso mocketh the poor (and crippled) reproacheth his maker; and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished (*Proverbs 17:5*).
The HUSIA-KHEMET	Laugh not at the blind, nor make fun dwarf, nor interfere with the plans of the lame. Do not harass those who are in the hands of God, if they err. Surely, humans are clay and straw, and God is the builder (*Amenomope*).

Chapter 3

THE ORISHA AS ANGELIC FORCES

THE YORUBA contend that the study of nature is foremost. Nature is viewed as the manifestation of Oludumare's Essence through degrees of material substance. That essence, translated as ashe, is the inherent force of all creation. The emphasis of such study or worship is not centered on the physical object or tangible, but on the life-force energy that brings about its form. The tangible object is but a symbol of the eternal existence that bore it.

Oludumare/Olorun is in all things as the ashe is the primal essence of all things. It is not the tree, the rock, the statue that African ancestors revere and worship but the deep energy that brought about its being. In maintaining the "nature religion" the ancestors were able to keep and also strengthen the very real connection between all things and human beings.

This concept is basic and fundamental in respect to religious involvement. Oludumare, the Creator, must be seen in all things. Humans, devoid of oppressive ego, must see themselves as also part of the creation, and behave accordingly. In respect to the orisha, it is to be understood that as "angelic forces" they, too, are a part of nature. As angels, they are comprised of greater heavenly properties and are closer to the divine source of Existence. Their ability to act on behalf of human beings is generally stated as divine intervention. Such intervention is brought about by divination, belief, faith, prayer, song and praise, dance, ritual, and sacrifice inclusive. This "bringing about" is a dual endeavor as both priest and devotee need follow certain

Figure 3. "Akpetebi" Sokoya Onayemi Aya Karade among the ere orisha (images of orisha). The Oshun odu-orisha (the vessel containing Oshun's mysteries), the Obi Abata, and Eshu are placed closed to her.

guidelines and practices to efficaciously heal or correct a corrupted situation.

Orisha as a term, is actually the combination of two Yoruba words. *Ori* which is the reflective spark of human consciousness embedded in human essence, and *sha* which is the ultimate potentiality of that consciousness to enter into or assimilate itself into the divine consciousness.

The human consciousness needs to pass through stages of development in order to attain the highest levels. The orisha symbolize the forces and forms of human divinity potential. In *Her Bak*, it is written that, "the Neters [divine beings-Orishas] are an expression of the principles and functions of divine power manifesting in nature. Their names and images as pictured in the myths define such principles and functions and they are offered that the student may learn to know them and seek them in him/her self."[1] This concept maintained by the ancients of Egypt and West Africa is evident, though somewhat dismissed, in all forms of religious and spiritual development.

"The Yoruba maintain that worship of the orisha assist in the development of *iwa-pele* or balanced character and balanced attitude. That the most important purpose of a person on earth is to come and exhibit that character and attitude."[2] Religion, as a custom of worship, is not man's purpose, but only a means to an end while the end itself is iwa-pele. Thus, the fundamental reality in respect to the divinity of self and the heavenly forces is that of pure and enlightened character development. This is the premise of true orisha involvement. The connection between one's consciousness (ori) and one's behavior (iwa-pele) is clearly seen as reciprocal and relative. That is, the more enlightened one's consciousness becomes, in respect to the divine, the

[1] Isha Schwaller de Lubicz, *Her-Bak: Egyptian Initiate* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1982), p. 27.

[2] S. Popoola, "Life: Its Purpose and Hereafter" in *Orunmila*, Issue 3 (June 1987), p. 13

more one's behavior reflects the divine. Thus, the individual is deemed saintly or priestly in their development.

The Orisha

Ori: G. Okemyiwa and A. Fubunmi state, "the word *Ori* has many meanings. [literally] Ori means head. It means the apex of all things, the highest of any endeavor. . . . In the human body Ori is divided into two—the physical head and the spiritual head. . . . The spiritual head is [also] subdivided into two—the *Ori Apari*—inner [the internal spiritual Ori] and the *Ori Apere* (the sign of an individual's personal god (orisha)."[3] The Ori Ode (physical head), the Ori Inu (the internal spirit), and the Iponri (the soul space of the inner-self) are more noted definitions of the Ori. It is revealed in the odu, Ogunda that "no god blesses a person without consent of their Ori. One whose Ori has accepted the sacrifice is one who should rejoice exceedingly." In all forms of ritual sacrifice offerings are first placed to the center or top of the head. This is due to Ori and the appeasement of Ori's divine nature.

Obatala: "Obatala, also known as Orisha-nla, Orishaala, Ogiyan is deemed the arch-divinity of Yorubaland. Obatala represents the idea of ritual purity and ethical purity, symbolized by immaculate whiteness associated with him—inside walls of temples are washed white, emblems are kept in white containers, and white robes, ornaments, and beads are for his priest and priestesses."[4] Obatala is viewed as the most intelligent and even-tempered of the orishas. Not only is he the "father of the orisha," but also the moulder of human form on Earth. He is the creative sculptor that forms the embryonic body of infants inside the womb. It was

[3] "Life: It's Purpose and Hereafter" in *Orunmila*, p. 15.
[4] George Simpson, *Yoruba Religions and Medicines of Ibadan* (Ibadab University Press, 1980), p. 3.

Obatala who first formed humankind out of the Earth's clay. Obatala is Oludumare's prime emissary on Earth. The followers of Obatala and others appeal to him for children, prosperity, the avenging of wrongs, and the curing of illness and deformities. They bring prayer and offerings to the priest and priestesses who present them to the altars or shrines on behalf of the followers.

Eshu-Elegba: Eshu, as a divinity, is viewed primarily as the powerful holder of the ashe or creative potency of the other orisha. For this reason all sacrifices and offerings must be shared with Eshu in some manner. He is the messenger divinity who delivers sacrifices to the orisha from humans and from one orisha to another. Eshu holds a conflictual position among humans and orisha alike, for he is the one who "tries their souls." Eshu tempts, thwarts, and disrupts. If all tests are passed he recreates. It is because Eshu is non-discriminating in enforcing the "laws of being," punishing, or rewarding, as whatever the case may be, that he is so respected and revered. He is in close proximity to all forces—positive and negative alike—as he is the prime negotiator between them. Awolalu writes, "The Yoruba tradition holds that Eshu maintains relationships with the super-sensible world and with human beings on Earth. With regard to the super-sensible world, he maintains close relationship with Orunmila who is notable for his wisdom and who knows the wishes of Deity and divinities."[5]

It is interesting to note that in Yorubaland, as stated by Awolalu, that "Eshu has no regular priesthood because he is associated with all the other divinities. But, whenever these other divinities are worshipped, due homage is paid to him."[6] Images of Eshu (generally constructed of clay, wood, stone, or concrete and adorned with cowries shells) are

[5] Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (White Plains, NY: Longman Group, 1979), p. 29.
[6] *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, p. 30.

found in every Yoruba home regardless of the priestly order, or status of the family. Also, Eshu is to be propitiated not only first before orisha, but also before Egun (ancestors).

Oshun: Oshun is the orisha of unconditional love, receptivity and diplomacy. She is known for her sensuality, fine artistic development and beauty. Oshun is a river divinity symbolizing clarity and flowing motion. She has powers to heal with cool water and to divine based on her dream revelations and sensual perception. Oshun is said to have many sides. On the one hand she can be very short-tempered and irritable on the other, she can be calm and fluid. Either could be the case depending on the devotee and/or the nature of the situation.

Oshun is also the divinity of fertility and feminine essence. Women appeal to her for child-bearing and for the alleviation of female disorders. She is fond of babies and is sought if a baby becomes ill. Oshun is reflected in brass, gold, and shining gems. She is known for her love of honey.

Ogun: Ogun is the divinity of iron and all that iron becomes. He is the patron of blacksmiths, hunters, and warriors. Ogun is also the divinity of clearing paths, specifically in respect to building civilizations. He is also depicted as the divinity of mechanization. Ogun is the essence of divine justice and truth on Earth. Devotees swear upon him in solemn reverence. Known for his keen insight into the hearts of men he is the liberator or executioner in the world.

Yemoja: Yemoja is the divinity of all the oceans. She is said to be the mother of all orisha and expresses her mothering throughout the earthly and heavenly realms. Yemoja is the matriarchal head of the cosmic universe. She is the ambiotic fluid in the womb of the pregnant woman, as well as, the breasts which nurture. She is known to be very stern and temperamental and expresses the protective energies of the

feminine force. Being of the earth-essence, she is proficient in the secret arts and will use them to protect her devotees.

Oya: Oya is the divinity that guards the cemetery. More specifically she protects the souls of the departed as they journey onward. Oya is viewed as a warrior with great strength. She stands well on her own, but is usually in the company of her counterpart Shango. Oya is also recognized for her psychic abilities which manifest in the winds. She is the deity of the storm and hurricanes. Oya is often seen as the deity of death, but upon deeper realization, she is the deity of rebirth as things must die so that new beginnings arise.

Shango: Shango is the deified Alafin (ruler) of medieval Oyo said to have hung himself because of his over-indulgence. His elevation to the orisha realm was brought about by his devout followers. They merged him with the deity of lightning and fierce retribution known as Jakuta. Shango's symbol is the double ax mounted on the head of the holy statues or dance wands (Oshe Shango). Shango is the orisha of the drum and dance. He possesses the ability to transform base substance into that which is pure and valuable. His devotees approach him for legal problems, protection from enemies, and to make bad situations better. Often viewed as a bit earthy, Shango is revered and earnestly listened to for he speaks only once and is prone to be temperamental.

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"In Africa, it is believed that divinities or gods are personifications of God's activities and manifestations. God's activities and manifestations are also discernible in natural phenomenon and objects, nature spirits, deified heroes and mythological figures."[7] As the study of orisha intensifies it becomes apparent that throughout Yorubaland every aspect

[7] M. Duko, "God & Godling's in African Ontology" in *Orunmila*, Issue 5 (June 1990), p. 49.

of nature is a vehicle to god-consciousness. Although the major seven have survived the Middle Passage, they were not the only ones.

The Yoruba orisha are examined in tables 2-4 on pages 29 and 30. The depictions show concise views of those attributes most generally related by New World practitioners. The general notion is that this is where the involvement with orisha stops. Aspirants who proclaim their affiliations based on worldly intentions must guard against delusion. Delusion leads to witchcraft or the manipulation of the ashe in order to satisfy the lower-base self. As devotees study orisha, they must be able to remain true to the major objectives of Yoruba faith—to express divine character, intent, and attitude (iwapele). Devotees are not to rest on preconceived notions as to what the orisha are about and attempt to "act like" the orisha. This is unwise. Through devotion to the orisha ordained as messenger, helper, and patron, the ashe will "act through" the devotee for the sole purpose of transformation, purification, and enlightenment. This ashe is to be channeled by the devotee through the process known as *aba*, which brings forth the manifestation of light into the world.

As New World Yoruba initiates expand their awareness, more orisha are revealed. A list of other orisha are included with one of their many attributes:

Olokun: *Orisha of the depths of the ocean.*
Oshoosi: *Orisha of warriors and hunters.*
Osun: *The staff of the babalawo symbolizing health, wisdom and protection.*
Ibeji: *Twins symbolizing the dual aspect of the cosmos.*
Oba: *River orisha.*
Aganyu: *Orisha of the volcano and core of the earth.*
Oko: *Orisha of the farm.*
Erinle: *Orisha of medicine.*
Osain: *Orisha of the plants and herbs.*
Babaluaiye: *Orisha of sickness and epidemics.*

Table 2. The Seven Major Orisha.

ORISHA	ATTRIBUTES
Obatala	Creator of Human Form, Elder of the Orisha, Wisdom, Purity, Morality, Strategy, High Intelligence, Peacemaker, Father, God of the White Cloth, Silver.
Elegba	Messenger of the Orisha, Courier of Offerings to the Orisha, Policeman of the Yoruba Cosmology, Guardian of the Cross-roads, Holder of Ashe (power) among the Orisa, Laterite Stone.
Ogun	Orisha of Iron, War, Creator of Civilizations, Courage, Strength, Justice and Oaths, Executioner, Pathmaker, Force, Stabilization, Security, Protection, Vehicles and Tools.
Yemoja	Motherhood, Mother of Waters, Family, Sexuality, Sorcery, Primal Waters, Nurturer.
Oshun	Sensuality, Fine Arts and Humanities, Love, Beauty, Graciousness, Gracefulness, Money, Sorcery, Luxury, Brass, Gold, Cowrie, Rivers, Intuition, Divination.
Shango	Kingly, Stately, Orator, Sorcery, Virility, Dance, Music (drums), Masculinity, Business, Fire, Lightning, Stones, Protector/Warrior, Magnetism.
Oya	Tempest, Guardian of the Cemetery, Winds of Change, Warrior, Hurricanes, Storms, Death, Progression.

Table 3. Color, Number, and Natural Environment.

ORISHA	COLOR	NUMBER*	NATURAL ENVIRONMENT
Obatala	White	8, 24	Mountains / Woods
Elegba	Red and Black White and Black	1, 3, 21	Woods, Crossroads, Gateways
Yemoja	Blue and Crystal	7	Oceans, Lakes (salt water)
Oshun	Yellow	5	Rivers, Lakes (fresh water)
Ogun	Green and Black	3	Railroads, Woods, Forges
Shango	Red	6, 12	Places struck by lightning, base of trees
Oya	Reddish-brown, Rust, Earth-tones	9	Cemetery, places hit by Hurricanes, Storms

* Numbers of the orisha may also include their multiples. Colors may be taken in shades.

Table 4. Physical Correspondences.

ORISHA	PHYSICAL CORRESPONDENCES
Obatala	brain, bones, white fluids of the body
Elegba	sympathetic nervous system, para sympathetic nervous system
Yemoja	womb, liver, breasts, buttocks
Oshun	circulatory system, digestive organs, elimination system, pubic area (female)
Ogun	heart, kidney (adrenal glands), tendons, and sinews
Shango	reproductive system (male), bone marrow, life force or chi
Oya	lungs, bronchial passages, mucous membranes

Ewe

The use of herbs and plants, called ewe in Yoruba, is one of great emphasis. Herbs are picked for medicinal, and spiritually empowering purposes. In Yorubaland herbs are gathered by the priestly and / or by the various types of herbalists who inhabit the regions. The herbs are often made available to the population either through private practice, or they can be purchased in a marketplace. In the New World, Yoruba-based aspirants are also herbally directed. Various botanicas (base word *botany*) exist in major cities in the Americas. Here priests and devotees alike go to obtain herbs for baths, religious artifacts, etc. Most botanicas are run by Hispanics, but

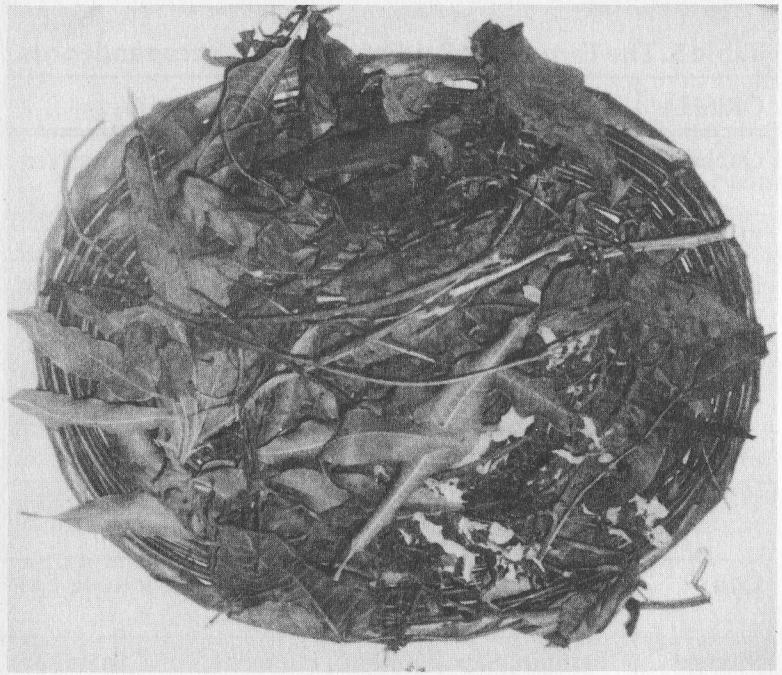


Figure 4. Ewe (herbs) obtained from botanicas for spiritual baths and consecration of sacred objects.

they are not limited to Hispanic patronage. Nigerians and people from other African countries have begun to set up businesses in increasing numbers in the Americas. Indigenous herbs are now becoming more accessible to Yoruba-directed devotees.

The ewe (herbs) are for the "healing of nations" and various health food stores provide them in both leaf and capsule form. Adherents to traditional practices are advised to apply herbs before going to synthetic products for healing. Numerous books on herbology can be found. Exploration of the possibilities of herbal use is recommended.

Table 5 shows herbal directives. They provide examples of the ewe based on the presiding orisha correspondence. It is best that novices seek out divination before attempting to get and prepare herbal solutions. It is also advisable to rely on priests and herbalists to begin the healing process before getting involved with the property and powers of herbs yourself.

Table 5. The Ewe and Presiding Orisha Correspondences.

ORISHA	EWE (HERBS) FOR MEDICINAL USAGE
Obatala	Skullcap, Sage, Kola Nut, Basil, Hyssop, Blue Vervain, White Willow, Valerian
Elegba	All Herbs
Oshun	Yellow Dock, Burdock, Cinnamon, Damiana, Anis, Raspberry, Yarrow, Chamomile, Lotus, Uva-Ursi, Buchu, Myrrh, Echinacea
Yemoja	Kelp, Squawvine, Cohosh, Dandelion, Yarrow, Aloe, Spirulina, Mints, Passion Flower, Wild Yam Root
Ogun	Eucalyptus, Alfalfa, Hawthorn, Bloodroot, Parsley, Motherwort, Garlic
Oya	Mullein, Comfrey, Cherrybark, Pleurisy Root, Elecampane, Horehound, Chickweed
Shango	Plantain, Saw Palmetto, Hibiscus, Fo-ti, Sarsaparilla, Nettles, Cayenne

The generally accepted way to prepare these herbs are as follows: The herbs are added alone or in combination to a kettle of mildly boiling water. Steep for approximately thirty minutes before straining. The remaining herbal solution is then prepared as a drink. In some instances the herbal solutions are used in diluted form for enemas. Sugar should never be added to herbal solutions. Honey may be used along with lemon.

Spiritual Baths

Spiritual baths require the following:

1. That the correct herbs are used. The formula is based upon divination by the priestly. The presiding orisha or egun is determined and the corresponding herbs are obtained and prepared.

2. That the spiritual baths be continued for the number of days specified. The number can range from 1 day to 21 days. This is also determined by divination.

3. During the period specified for the taking of spiritual baths there is to be light eating, sexual abstinence, emotional balance, and no use of intoxicants. Daily prayer and affirmations need to be said as well.

Before taking spiritual baths make sure that you set up your space. There are a number of things that you need to do to prepare yourself.

1. You need a white sheet or large towel to wrap yourself in, and a white cloth to cover your head immediately after the bath (all sheets, etc., should be made of cotton).

2. Your space should be cleansed with incense made of myrrh and frankincense.

3. The tub, sink, and vessel that will hold the spiritual bath should be clean. Other areas involved should also be clean.

4. White candles should be lit in the bathroom and any other areas involved.

5. Silence or meditative sounds should prevail.

6. Keep spiritual bath concentrates in the refrigerator when not in use, and always label the bottle!

The spiritual bath does not require that one sit in a tub. This is an immersion and should be specifically prescribed by the diviner or herbalist. The herbal solution should be diluted with water at a 12:1 or 8:1 ratio. (Example: 12 parts water to 1 part herbal solution.) The water should be cool or tepid, but *never* hot. Shake the herbal solution well before pouring it into the basin or gourd. It really doesn't matter which goes in first, but it is easiest to measure the solution first, and then add the water.

1. First bathe or shower with natural soaps and shampoos.

2. Dry off (optional).

3. Kneel reverently or stand with conviction in the tub or shower area.

4. Gently pour the diluted herbal solution over your body. Pray aloud or silently for peace and protection.

5. Lightly pat-dry yourself off, wrap up in the white sheet, cover your hair with the cloth.

6. Clean the tub, vessel, or sink by wiping it out with a mild cleanser.

7. Retire for study, meditation, or just quiet time. Relax.

Note: Early morning or night quiet are the preferred times to take a spiritual bath. You may take a regular bath or shower after at least four hours have elapsed, if necessary. Sisters, if you are menstruating, or pregnant, ask the diviner to check specifically to determine if it is appropriate for you to take a spiritual bath during these times.

Spiritual baths are basically made by placing the specific herbs into a pot of heated water (see table 6 on page 36 for specific herbs and their Orisha correspondence). The herbs are then set to boil. After the herbs have boiled (which releases the ashe) they are strained. The solution remaining constitutes the spiritual bath. Various substances such as efun and oils, are added to enhance the ashe as needed. The bath constitution is known as *omiero* when sacrificial blood is included.

Prayers are said over the herbs as they are being prepared. Osain, the divinity-orisha of botany and herbology, is invoked so that the healing elements be forthcoming. One incantation to Osain is "Ashe Omo Osain Ewe Aye" (The power of Osain's children, the plants of the Earth).

Spiritual baths are suggested to devotees who need to be cleansed of negative influences which have impacted upon their aura or essence. The herbal properties are absorbed into the human dimensions and assist in the dissipation of negative influences. Spiritual baths may also be prescribed as preventives in these regards. Many forms of Yoruba initiations involve the bathing of the initiate in the ewe in order to enhance her/his ashe. Religious objects are also bathed in omiero as a part of the consecration of those objects.

Table 6. Ewe (Herbs) for Spiritual Baths.

ORISHA	ENGLISH (HERBS)	SPANISH (HIERBAS OR PLANTAS)
Obatala	Sweet Basil Tropical Almon Green Calalu Wild Tobacco Sage	Albahaca Almendra Bledo Blanco Salvia Salvia-de-Castilla Paraiso Suco Blanco Malva Aquinaldo Blanco
Elegba	Balmony Guava Tobacco Sugar Cane	Amansa Guapo Guayaba Tabaco Cano Abre Camino Mejoran Almaceyo Espartillo Albahaca
Ogun	Eucalyptus Tobacco	Eucalypto Tabaco Siempre Viva Maravilla Romerillo
Oya	Royal Poinciana	Flamboyan Cucaracha

Table 6. Ewe (Herbs) for Spiritual Baths (continued).

Oya (cont.)		Caimito Yucca
Yemoja	Oregano Plantain Spearmint Laurel	Marjorana Platano Yerba Buena Verbena Canutillo Cucaracha
Oshun	Papaya Wild Lettuce Bonset Cinnamon	Lechosa Rompesaraguey Caisimon Cassava Boton de Oro Abre Camino Sauco Blanco
Shango	Sacred Ficus Spanish Mahogany Cedar African Teak Plantain Bonset Sugar Cane Sarsaparilla Camwood	Alamo Coaba Cedar Ceiba Platano Rompesaraguey Cano Zarzaparilla

The Orisha Internal

The highest purpose of esotericism is that of the internalization of concepts, philosophies, and religious practices. Internalization is the process which brings the devout to stages of development based on inner growth and understanding. If no religious practice or doctrine were internalized then change would not be possible, especially from a spiritual-religious standpoint.

Theosophical questions in regards to where the orisha literally dwell arise when devotees begin to sense the unfolding of the orisha's divine attributes from within. The answers are relatively simple. Yes, the orisha dwell within the human existence. Eastern and western traditions alike maintain that the holy ones—sacred entities, prophets, angels—do have a focal point in the vast dimensions of the human mind and body. Yogic chakras, as internal wheels of energy that exist in the physical/spiritual body, are examined in this light.

Through actual experience and research it has been noted that within the chakras, (see figure 5) regardless of cultural persuasion, there exist psycho-hormones, nerve plexi, and divinities. The chakras, the orisha, and the behavioral modes which are related to them are presented in figures 6 through 12 on pages 40–46. Upon study, it becomes evident that the chakra modes correspond very easily to the directives of the orisha.[8]

[8] Information regarding the chakras is adapted from Harish Johari's *Chakra's: Energy Centers of Transformation* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1987).

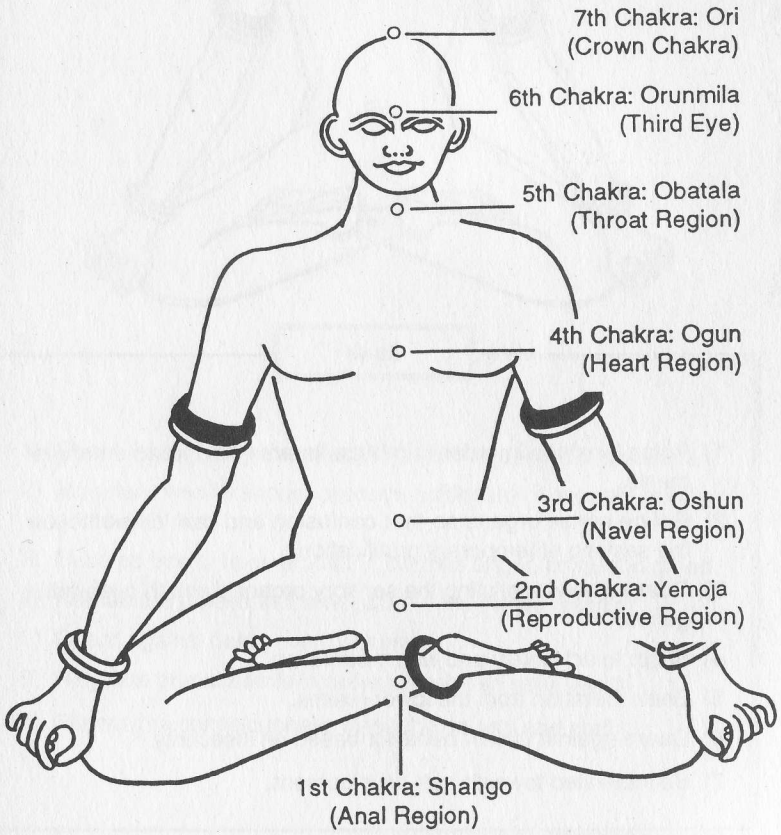


Figure 5. The Chakras of the human body.

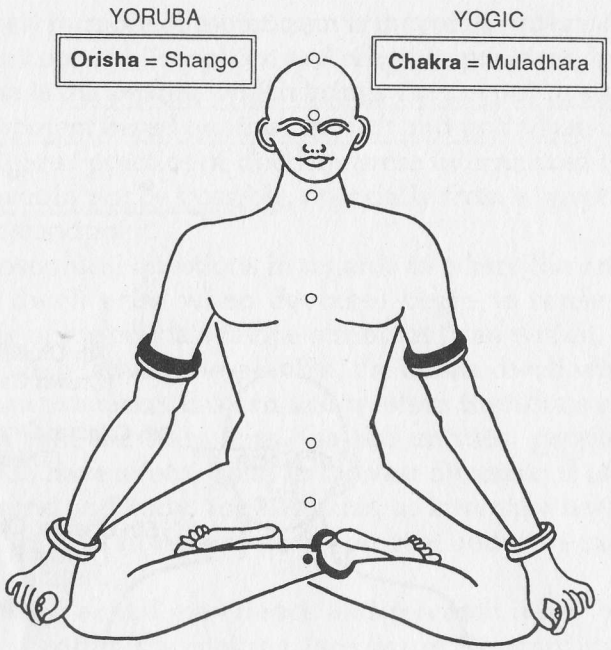


Figure 6. The first chakra.

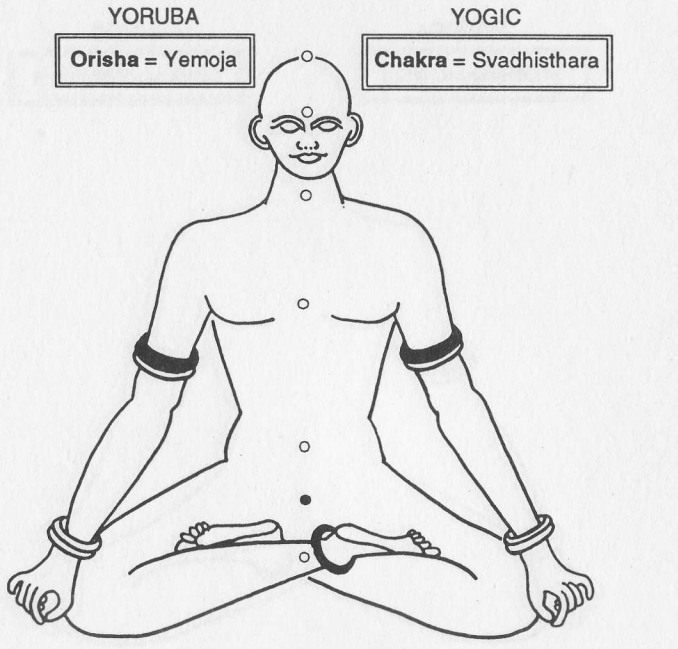
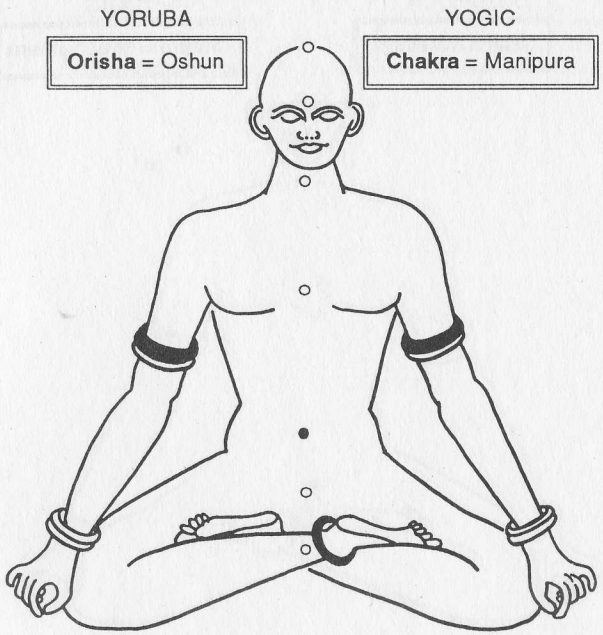


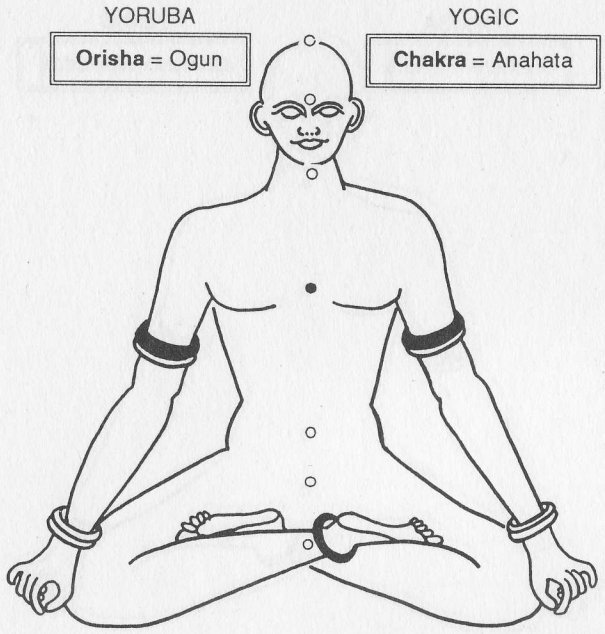
Figure 7. The second chakra.



Goals

1) Recognize that using anger to control others leads to long term failure.
2) Reflect more on the consequences of actions.
3) Guard against vanity and false pride.
4) Motivation is stimulated by the need for recognition, immortality, and power.
5) Seek to develop a positive ego and identity.
6) Give charity and selfless service.
7) Let love and compassion radiate from within.

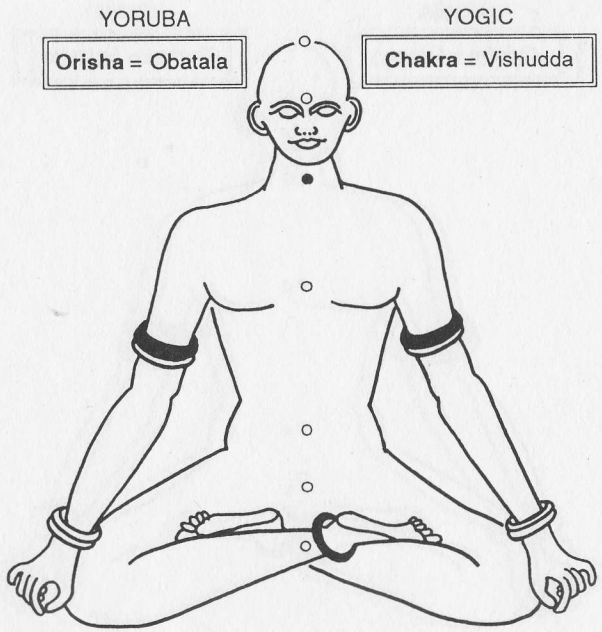
Figure 8. The third chakra.



Goals

1) Develop a higher sense of awareness and sensitivity.
2) Emphasize a sense of purity, innocence, and magnestism.
3) Reflect upon inner sounds (Nada Yoga).
4) Strive to become independent and self-emanating.
5) Strive to attain wisdom and inner strength.
6) Seek to control the breathing and heart rate.
7) Purity of relationships comes through the inner balancing of male and female energies.

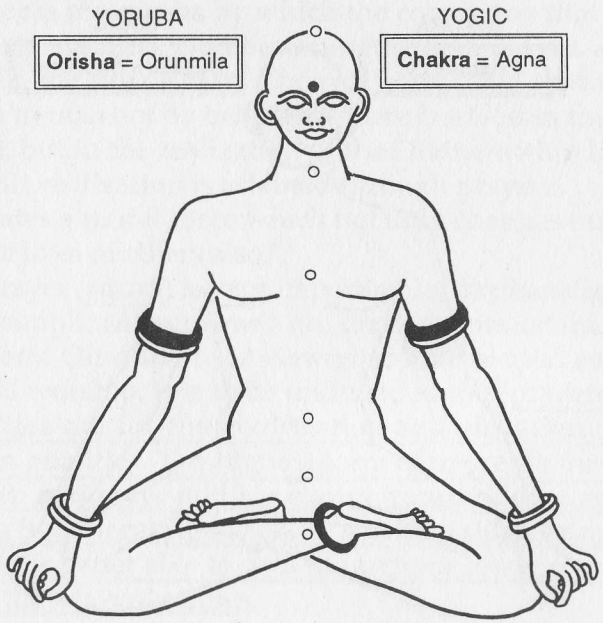
Figure 9. The fourth chakra.



Goals

1) Purify your sound to affect listeners in a positive way.
2) Awaken the dawning of awareness of eternal knowledge.
3) Supreme reason must overcome the emotions of the heart.
4) Use psychic energy and clairvoyance to communicate without words.
5) Guard against negative thought and use your knowledge wisely.
6) Become the master of the entire self.
7) Concentrate on the cooling mechanism (throat chakra).

Figure 10. The fifth chakra.



Goals

1) Meditate on the third eye to eradicate sins and impurities.
2) You reveal the divine within; you reflect divinity within others.
3) Practice austerity to bring about cosmic oneness.
4) Maintain proper balance through spiritual devotion.
5) Become One-Pointed. Become beyond the negative forces that pull one in many directions.
6) You may interpret the inner meanings of Cosmic Laws. You may generate scriptures.
7) You have the ability to induce visions of the past, present, future.

Figure 11. The sixth chakra.

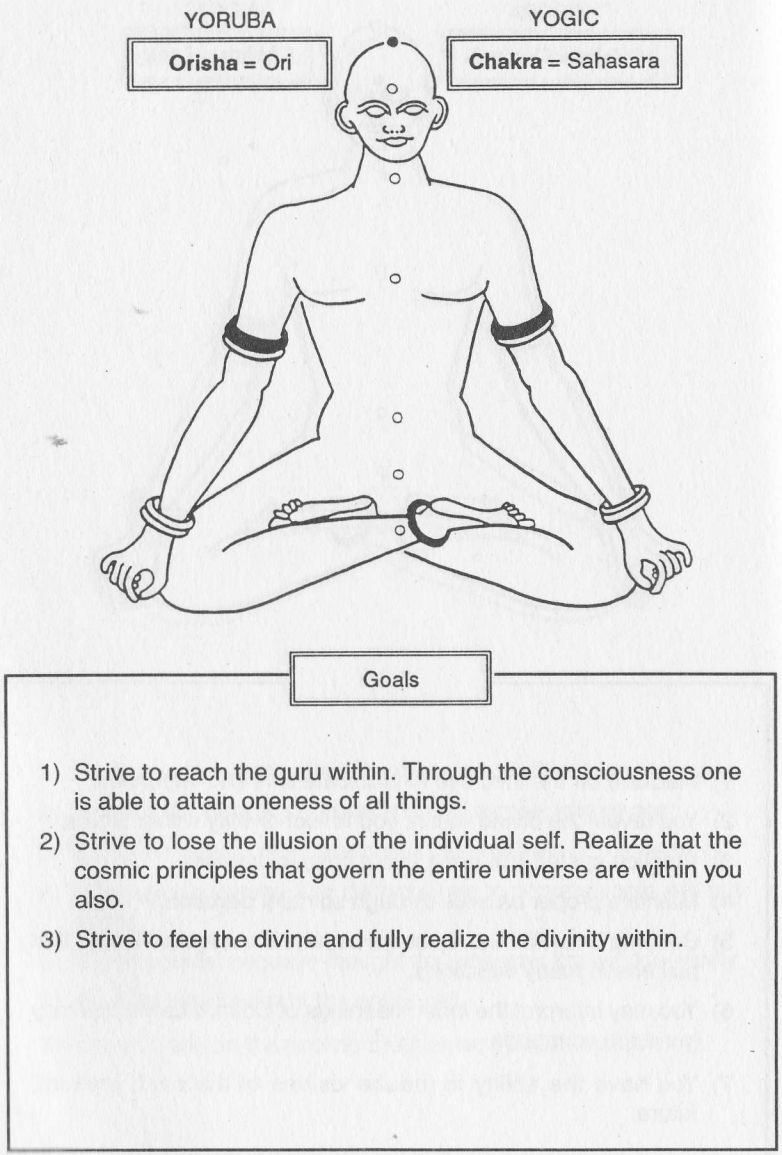


Figure 12. The seventh chakra.

Prayer

"Prayer is the means by which the conviction that God is becomes instilled. God becomes, through prayer, a living force in the life of man. The real conviction that God is, comes to man not by belief that there is a God in the outer-world, but in the realization of the Divine within himself; and this realization is attained through prayer. . . . Prayer generates a moral force which not only changes our lives, but the lives of others also."[9]

Prayer (adura) is very important in Yoruba religion. To make supplications to one's ori, the ancestors, orisha, Orunmila, and Oludumare is viewed as an essential aspect of Yoruba worship. It is to be understood that prayers to the divinities are for the purification and elevation of base human qualities. The highest form of prayer is that of the devotee asking for nothing except transcendence and protection from negating forces. By means of sincere prayer the devotee is better able to pass through the lower realms and attain the heavenly states.

Yoruba priests and priestesses are directed to assist devotees in their heavenly and earthly trials. Prayers to the deities for bearing children, finance, employment, marriage, etc., fall under earthly tribulations. Prayers are strong voices against the oppressive earth forces that are limiting human stability and growth. By "calling on" the heavens the priestly are lending their voices to the eternal ether. Through their power (the power of prayer) they seek to bring about change. The heavenly host are activated to combat or placate the detrimental forces.

Bringing about such changes for the purpose of worldly gains only is considered sorcery. Prayer and sorcery do not connect. It is somewhat illogical to the divine psyche to place them together. When prayer is connected with the sacred unfoldment of the devotee a sense of divine feeling

[9] Muhammad Ali, *The Muslim Prayer Book* (Ahmaduiyya, 1938), pp. 11–14.

Figure 13. An Ifa worshiper (onifa) gazes solemnly toward the inner heavens. The staff (opa) that she holds represents stability and strength gained from the Earth.

ensues. This divine feeling is absent when sorcery is connected to a devotee. Prayer brings about divine intervention and the betterment of the devotee's person. Sorcery does not. If clearly examined, we can conclude that sorcery brings about the opposite of priestly development. Prayer, of course enhances it. This is why the priestly are constantly directing the people in the way of the divine. The people must not fall victim to the forces of sorcery and illusion. It is as if to say "pray or be preyed upon"—in other words, pray or fall victim to disruptive forces.

It is important to set specific times and places for prayer. This disciplines the mind, which must be clear and focused, in order to strengthen the endeavor. Dawn, or upon rising, is an especially good time for prayer as the mind and emotions have not yet been caught up in the world. At dawn, the ori is clear and the consciousness of the body is more open to creative sources of light and energy. Prayer before going to sleep is also potent. The aspirant then clears the ori of the day-long experiences and is set to rest from the worldly trials. The essence of spirit is reawakened and maintained throughout the dream-subconscious states.

For the Yoruba traditionalist, setting the proper atmosphere for prayer is duly important. Candles, incense, bowls of water and fruits provide the spiritual essence that usually envelopes a place of prayer or reverence. Musical instrumentation also plays a great part in setting the atmosphere. Yoruba devotees include drums, rattles, bells, handclaps, and song in the prayer directive. Prayers are often "sung" or chanted in rhythm and in harmony with the music. When prayers are said in the way of praise songs they are called oriki. The oriki more specifically tell of the attributes and powers of the deities. The deities are approached with awe and respect openly. The oriki speak of the angelic force, wisdom, and abilities.

Devotees are set to learn prayers specific to their personal deities under the auspices of their priest. Novices are

not to overextend themselves in the desire to learn all prayers. It is better to grasp what can be understood and go deep within. The prayers on pages 51–59 to the orisha are given in English so that New World worshipers have means to strengthen their religiosity through heavenly commune.

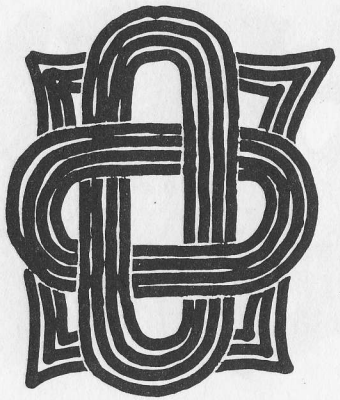
Although prayers need to be made at the shrines or altars of the given orisha, in no way is this a limitation. Prayers may be said at anytime and at anyplace conducive to the elevating of one's self.

Ori

My Ori it is you.
Ori I hail you,
You who always remembers your devotee,
You who gives blessings to your devotee
more quickly than other deities.

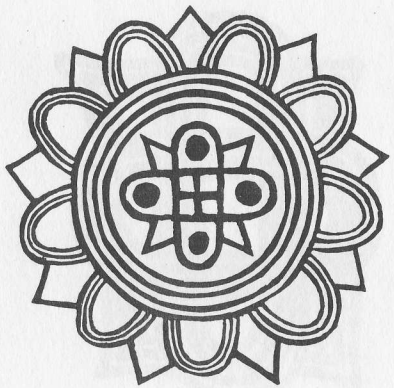
No deity blesses one without consent of their Ori.
A person whose sacrifice is accepted by their own Ori
Should rejoice exceedingly.

Ori please do not shut the gate.
It is to you that I am coming.
Come and make my life prosperous
It is Ori that brings fortune.



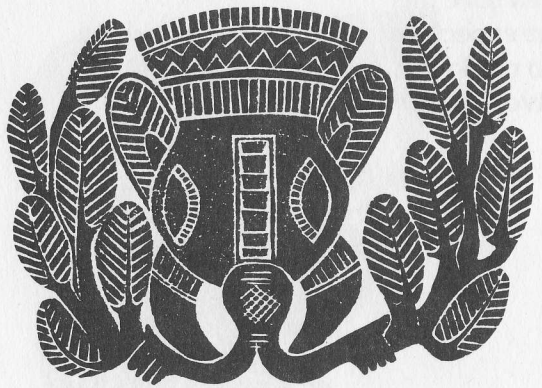
Eshu

Eshu protect my family.
Protect the initiates of the Temple and me also.
Let me not be moved against the people.
Let not the people be moved against me.
Grant me long life.
Grant me peace.
Grant me elevation of my consciousness.
Grant me the ability to use my own hands.
Eshu I salute you.



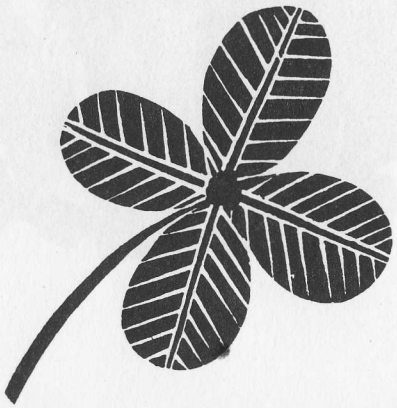
Obatala

Orisa'ala, the great one who owns the world,
And to whom the control of the world must be assigned.
Obatala, Obatarisa, the Orisa with authority
Who is as precious as pure honey.
The orisha with inexhaustible strength,
The inheritor of reputation
Whose great fame does not detract from his authority.
Obatala save me!
One expects salvation from one's orisha.
I do not know how to save myself.



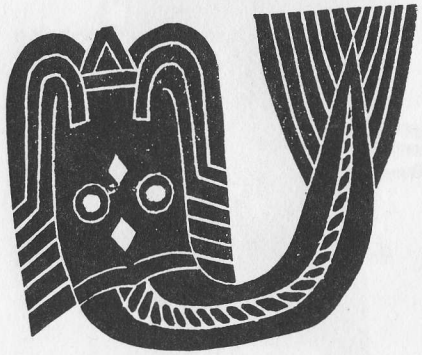
Oshun

Oshun, who is full of understanding.
Most gracious mother, Oshun,
Most gracious Orisha.
One who has large robust breasts,
One who appeases children
With brass ornaments.
Onikii who knows the secrets of cults,
But does not disclose them.
One who has a cool, fresh throne.
One who buries money in the sand.
The gracious mother, The Queen of the River
Water which moves sleeplessly.
One who gives healing water free of charge.
One who gives good effective treatment to
children.
One who has neither bone nor blood.
Ayila save me!
One expects salvation from one's deity.
I do not know how to save myself.
I give homage to Oshun, Ashe



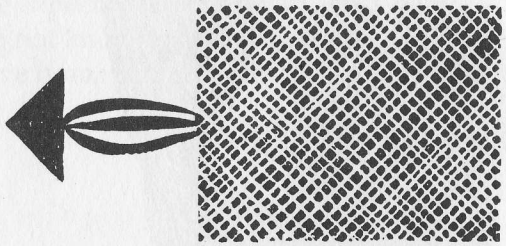
Yemoja

Yemoja, mother of the fishes,
Mother of the waters on the earth.
Nurture me, my mother
Protect and guide me.
Like the waves of the ocean,
wash away the trials that I bear.
Grant me children.
Grant me peace.
Let not the witches devour me.
Let not evil people destroy me.
Yemoja, mother of all,
Nurture me my mother.



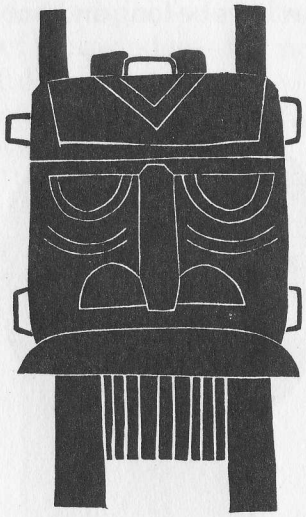
Oba Shango

Shango has come. Let every human being
come and watch.
Shango, do not quarrel with me.
I am not one of them who is against you.
There are two solutions to a problem; Shango
please resolve them.
Obakosa, the powerful king,
My lord, the owner of the big royal drums,
Protect us from misfortune,
Protect us from illness,
Let us experience the calm and gentle things of
life.



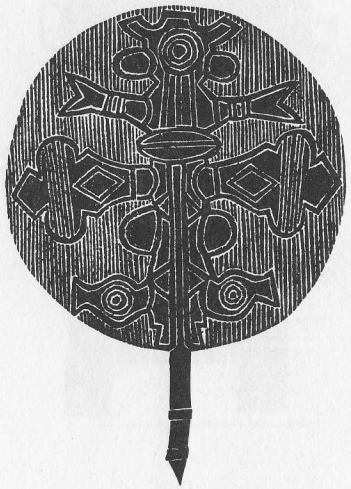
Ogun

Ogun the powerful one,
Sufficiently great to stand before death.
One who makes human beings prosperous.
One who is not enriched by Ogun will
Find it difficult to get sacrificial kola-nuts.
Ogun enrich me.
Ogun the powerful one,
The strong one of the earth,
The great one of the other world,
The protector of those who are being injured.
Ogun support me.



Oya

As powerful as the strong wind,
More fierce than the storm,
Oya guard my soul against the many fingers of evil.
Help me to rest upon the earth free from strain and undue frustration.
Oya, warrior of the wind, let not our land be overrun
with destroyers.
Let us not die in pain and sorrow.
Extend your weapon to protect us from destruction.
Oya, may we live and die to live again.
Oya, may our lives be long and our death short.



Orunmila

Orunmila, witness of fate second to Oludumare, thou art more efficacious than medicine.
Thou the immense orbit that averts the day of death.
My Lord Almighty who to save, Mysterious spirit that fought death—to thee salutation is first due in the morning.
Thou, equilibrium that adjust world forces, thou art the one whose exertion it is to reconstruct the creature of bad lot.
Repairer of misfortune—those who know thee become immortal.
My Lord the "undeposible" King—perfect in the house of wisdom—infinite in the house of knowledge—for not knowing thee in full, we are futile.
Oh, of we could but know thee in full, all would be well with us.

Sacred Places of Worship

The Yoruba refer to sacred places mainly as ojubo (the place of worship). If the place of worship is for an orisha it is called *ile orisha* or *oju orisha*. If it is for the ancestors (an ancestral shrine or altar) then it is called *oju egun*. The major understanding that needs to be reached is as Awolalu states, "the multiplicity of shrines stresses the fact that a shrine is not a permanent or only abode of a divinity. . . . When the divinity is invoked, it is believed that the divinity will be present to meet with worshippers [regardless of the locale] to receive their prayers and offerings, and to bless them."[10]

Devotees of orisha (aborisha) generally present offerings as they pray to the angelic forces. Temples or "houses" as they are known in the New World, contain the shrines of a particular or group of orisha. Devotees attend the temples and are serviced by the priestly orders in the way of prayers, offerings, sacrifices, and ritual. Yet, as earlier stated, prayers and offerings need not be done solely at temple shrines. They may be done at the natural site of orisha essence. The Earth itself is viewed as a shrine in this respect. Devotees may religiously seek the orisha from this perspective as well.

It is not necessary to kneel while praying, although it has always been a Yoruba way. To stand, prostrate oneself, or to kneel are all noted as positions of the Yoruba to offer prayer and homage. The emphasis of prayer is the opening of one's heart to the love of life and one's mind to the way of the Universe. The physical position taken is of secondary importance.

Yoruba forms of placing the body in positions of reverence are called foribale. (Mo)foribale—I place my head to

[10] Omosade Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (White Plains, NY: Longman Group, 1979), p. 114.

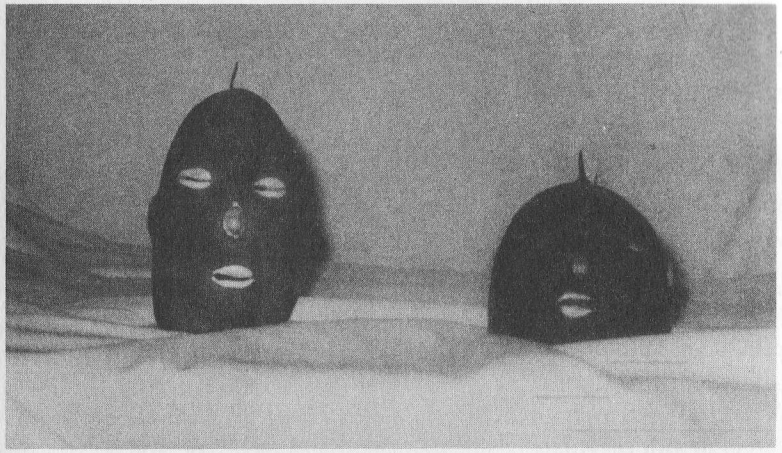


Figure 14. Eshu Elegbas are ritually presented to initiates of Yoruba. Elebga is the orisha that holds the ashe and delivers messages and sacrifices. The point at the top of the head is called the ashe-Elegbara. It serves as the focal point for Eshu's divine energy.

the earth—is the term that is solemnly uttered by devotees when homage is paid to the ancestors, orisha, or the priestly. Males and females foribale differently but, this is not a gender statement from a human point of view. In the New World interpretation, if the devotee has a female orisha as a "crown orisha" then foribale is done in a particular way. If the devotee has a male orisha as a "crown orisha" then another way of foribale is designated.

Prostration in front of the shrine or *elegun* (one possessed with orisha) is most commonly done when the devotee has a male orisha. Placing the right hip and elbow to the ground while putting the head on the right hand then switching sides is done by devotees who have female orisha. All devotees prostrate themselves before queens, kings, chiefs, and babalawos; or they kneel slightly touching the right hand to the floor or ground.

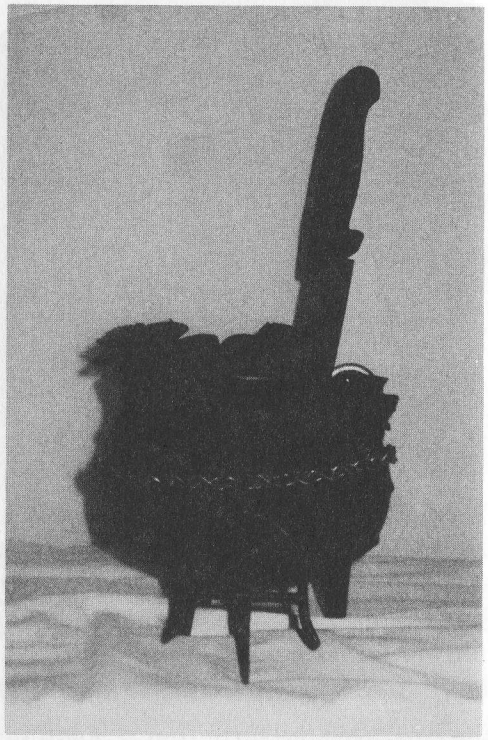


Figure 15. Ogun is symbolized by the cauldron into which metal objects are placed. Knives are often added as Ogun is first to taste the blood of any sacrificial animal. Oshoosi is represented by the bow and arrow. This symbol is also placed in the cauldron as Ogun and Oshoosi live together.

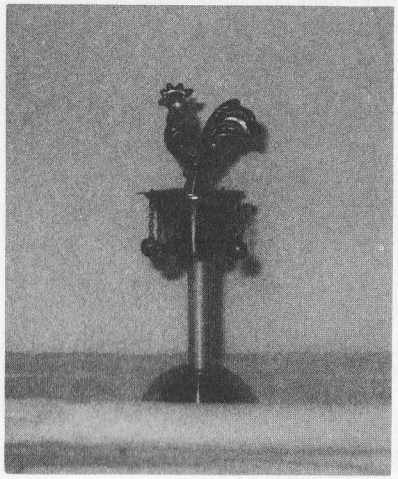


Figure 16. The Osun is that version of the babalawos staff. It is presented along with the ajagun (warriors). The Osun symbolizes health, wisdom, and protection against witches. If it ever falls, a babalawo is consulted.

Ijuba—To Give Homage

The pouring of libation or mojubar (I give homage) is a prominent facet in regards to Yoruba reverence. The mojubar is given before all religious and social events. To give homage to the orisha, to the ancestors, to Oludumare, and to one's teachers or god-parents is a necessary step which needs to be taken before any endeavor is begun.

Pouring libation is generally performed by one of the priestly order. If there are none present, then an aborisha may pour the libation or one who is spiritually motivated although he or she has no initiations. Water is the element used in the pouring of libation. The priest pours small amounts on the floor, ground, or earth and recites the mojubar (see page 64). Infrequently, gin (oti) is used.

Dance and Song (Ijo ati Orin)

Among the Yoruba, the expression of worship through dance and song is all encompassing. Every aspect of the religion finds its way through the human embodiment as movement and vocalization open the devotee to the ashe of the ancestors and/or the orisha. Drewal writes that, "through dance, spiritual forces materialize in the phenomenal world. The god is said to mount the devotee and, for a time, that devotee becomes the god. . . . Possession and trance states are often expressed through the medium of dance."[11] As in other devotional expressions it is the priestly who direct and monitor the dance and song of the orisha. The priestly must be knowledgeable of the orisha as they manifest themselves through the human vehicle. Invoked through their particular dance patterns and song (orin) the orisha "mounts" the priest or devotee. The priest must be able to invoke and channel the healing forces of the orisha.

[11] Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Plays, Agency* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 23.

Mojubar

Omi Tutu
Ile Tutu
Ona Tutu
Tutu Eshu
Tutu Orisha

Mojubar: I give homage
Omi: Water
Tutu: Cool, fresh
Ilc: House/Temple
Ona: Road/path

Mojubar Olorun, Mojubar Olofi
Mojubar Oludumare

Olorun, Olofi, & Oludumare
Aspects of The Creator

Mojubar Ibae Egun Gbogbo
Egun Ibae

Egun: Ancestors

Mojubar Babalorisha, Iyalorisha
Oluo Ara Arun

Babalorisha: Godfather
Iyalosarisha: Godmother
Oluo Ara Run: Elder
Citizens of Heaven

Mojubar Gbogbo Iku Nbelese
Oludumare Iba'iye Orun

All the Dead that bow at
the feet of Oludumare
in Heaven

Ki Nkan Ma Se
(insert names
of god-parents)

Protect us (those of my
spiritual lineage)

Kosi Iku: Death
Kosi Arun: Sickness
Kosi Ofo: Loss
Kosi Fitibo: Being Overwhelmed
Kosi Idina: Obstacles
Kosi Egba: Paralysis
Kosi Ese: Evil
Kosi Eyo: Tragedy
Ariku Babawa: Let us not see death, our Father.
Ariku Iyawa: Let us not see death, our Mother.

Kosi: To avert

Figure 17. Yoruba aborisha (devotee) uplifts her hands in praise as she dances for the orisha. She wears the ilekes—religious beads ceremoniously presented to New World Yoruba aspirants—proudly around her neck.

Often, the high priest of Yoruba are set to remind devotees that dance, in respect to religion, is beyond the superficial taking of orisha dance classes. Orisha dance is a form of prayer and empowerment centered on the body-temple. Orisha dance should not be separated from orisha worship.

Novices of the religion are set to learn the sacred dances and songs. Much of these forms have come from the New World interpretations as expressed through Santeria

and Lucumi. Frequent communal gatherings (bembe in New World terms) provide opportunities to dance and sing to the rhythm of bata drums or congas as a way of giving praise to orisha and invoking their power. The dance energy and movements reflect the natural attributes of the corresponding orisha. Obatala is more slow and concentrated; Ogun is strong and rooted; Yemoja is like the tides of the ocean; Oshun is graceful and expresses beauty; Shango is drawing lightning down from the sky; Oya is like the whirlwind or stormy hurricane; Elegba is balancing and flexible.

Some religious songs (orin) have been presented on the following pages so that devotees are better able to join in the communal giving of praise to the orisha. Numerous recordings and books on Yoruba (branches) have been produced.[12] Rhythmic patterns and melodies are more New World interpretation than Yoruba proper. Devotees may continually lend their own accent in order to feel elevated and at one with the heavenly states of being.

[12] See especially John Mason's *Orin Orisa: Songs for Selected Heads* (Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1992). The Yoruba religious songs are part of the New World Orisha tradition. You may find some of these songs in orisha dance classes or at your local music store in the international section.

Elegba 1

Lead: MOJUBA ORISA, MOJUBA O, MOJUBA ORISA

Chorus: ASE, MOJUBA ORISA

(Authority, I pay homage to the selected head.)

Lead: MOJUBA O, MOJUBA ORISA

(I pay homage to the selected head.)

Chorus: ASE MOJUBA ORISA

Lead: MOJUBAO MOJUBA ORISA

Chorus: ASE, MOJUBA ORISA

Lead: IBA ORISA IBA ALAYE O

(Homage to the selected head, homage to the owner of the World.)

Chorus: ASE, MOJUBA ORISA

Elegba 2

Lead: IBA'RA'GO MOJUBA
IBA'RA'GO AGO MOJUBA
OMODE KONI'KO S'IBA'GO AGO MOJUBA
ELEGBA ESU LONA

Chorus: Repeat same.

(Homage to the relative of the Club. Give way, I pay homage. Child who teaches the doctrine of paying homage to the club, make way. I pay homage to the Owner of Vital Force (Ase), Esu is the one who owns the road.)

Lead: ALAGONGON 'LARO, AGONGON 'LAROYE

ELEGBA DE MA DA NKI O

Chorus: Repeat same.

(Owner of swiftness, owner of titles of honor. Swift-footed owner of titles. Owner of vital force come, but do not greet me only.)

Lead: ALAGONGON 'LARO

Chorus: LAROYE

Lead: ALAGONGON 'LARO

Chorus: ELEGBA

Lead: ALAGONGON 'LARO

Chorus: ESU L'ONA

All: ALAGONGON 'LARO

Elegba 3

Lead: ELEGBA O ELEGBA NSO YANGA
ALAROYE MO DA NKI O
ELEGBA NSO YANGO

Chorus: Repeat same.

(Owner of vital force, owner of vital force, talking pridefully. Owner of communication, I alone salute you. Owner of vital force, talking pridefully.)

Obatala

All: BABA FU RURU, L'ORE'RE O.
OKA YEYE ELEJIGBO
ELERI'FA, GBA SI GBA SA WO.
EJIGBO RE RE GBA SI GBA WO
E NU AYE, EYA WA L'ORO
EYA WA L'ORO ELESE'KA

(Father of the white cloth that rises and swells [like a cloud].
Owner of the whips of profit.
Boa honored, honored Chief of Ejigbo
The Owner of the Head of Advantage strikes and strikes [with a stick] just behold
Ejigbo's whips of profit, strike and strike behold
You clean the world.
Our tribe has the tradition
Our tribe has the tradition as supports of the boa.)

All: E NU AYE 'MI 'MO SE O
E NU AYE 'MI BABA
E NU AYE 'MI 'MO SE O
E NU AYE 'MI BABA
OBATALA TA WINIWINI SE KU'RE
GBOGBO LA NYA SE RERE

(You fill the world with life, knowledge accomplishes it
You fill the world with life, father.
King of the White Cloth, a blessing,
All dream of warming the flow of goodness.)

Orunmila

Lead: ORUNMILA TALADE, BABA MO FORI BALE

Chorus: Repeat same

("Only Heaven can effect Salvation" is who owns the crown, Father I put my head on the ground.)

Egun

All: EGUN MOJUBA IBA E
EGUN MOJUBA IBA E
EGUN GBOGBO MOJUBA IBA E
EGUN GBOGBO MOJUBA IBA E

(I pay homage to the Ancestors. All pay homage to the Ancestors.)

Ogun

All: OGUN DE ARE'RE IRE GBOGBO LO O KU AIYE
OGUN WA NILE OKE WA L'ONA
IRE GBOGBO LO O KU AYE

*(Ogun arrives, title-holder of Ire [township he founded].
All of Ire proclaim, May you live forever in the world.
Ogun comes to occupy the house.
The mountain comes to have the road
All of Ire proclaims, may you live forever in the world.)*

Ori

All: ORI I MI, ORI I MI, YO MI

(My mind save [me].)

Oshoosi

All: OSHOOSI O MO MI WARA WARA OKE OKE
OBA 'LOKE O MO MI WARA WARA OKE OKE

(Oshoosi you know me, quickly cherish [me] cherish [me]

King who owns the mountain, you know me quickly. Cherish [me]

Cherish [me]).

Repeat.

Lead: OSHOOSI AYILOODA. MALAMALA DE

Chorus: Repeat.

(Oshoosi, revolver that turns away famine, The dazzling one arrives.)

Lead: YAA BE ILEKE IWORO ODE MATA. AGO OLONA

Chorus: Repeat.

(Let us quickly petition the uppermost caretaker of the hunter's tradition, do not shoot. Make way, owner of the path.)

Lead: S'IRE S'IRE

Chorus: ODE MATA ORE ORE

Lead: WOLE WOLE

Chorus: ODE MATA ORE ORE

Lead: YI'RE YI'RE

Chorus: ODE MATA ORE ORE

*(Uncover goodness, uncover goodness,
Hunter do not shoot, friend, friend
Enter the house, Enter the house
Hunter do not shoot, friend, friend
Turn goodness, turn goodness [to me]
Hunter do not shoot, friend, friend.)*

Oshun

All: IYA MI ILE ODO
IYA MI ILE ODO
GBOGBO ASE, O BI NI SALA MAA WO E
IYA MI ILE ODO

(My Mother's house is the river. My Mother's house is the river.
All powerful. Women that flee for safety habitually visit her.)

IYA MI ILE ORO; IYA MI ILE ORO
GBOGBO ASE, ISE MI SARAA MAA WO E
IYA MI ILE ORO

(My Mother, House of tradition; My Mother, House of Tradition
All powerful, my deeds of charity habitually consult you. My Mother, House of tradition.)

Repeat.

All: BI'MO OSUN GBA ILE LE
O SU O. ASE WOLE WU'RE

(You sprout abundantly yes. Power enter the house; swell goodness.)

Repeat.

Yemoja

All: YEMOJA ASE'SUN, ASE'SUN YEMOJA
YEMOJA ASE'SUN, ASE'SUN YEMOJA
YEMOJA OLODO, OLODO YEMOJA
YEMOJA OLODO, OLODO YEMOJA

(Yemoja is the Gush of the Spring, The Gush of the spring is Yemoja.
The Mother of the Children of Fishes is the Owner of the Rivers.)

Shango

Lead: MO FORI BO RERE O SHANGO TO'KAN O YA DE

Chorus: Repeat.

Lead: A WA'NILE ONILE O KU O
A WA'NILE ONILE O YA

Chorus: Repeat.

(I use my head to be covered with good,
Sango is worthy, he who's tears arrives.
Owner of the Earth long life to you.
We come to the owner of the earth,
the owner of the Earth who tears.)

Oya

Call & Response: OYA O YA ILE O
OYA MO BA L'ORO'KE

(Tearer, you borrow the house,
The Tearer, I found, has the highest tradition.)

Ancestral Reverence

It is the ancestors who have interpreted and revealed the words of the universal construct. They have actualized the ashe in regards to psychological and cultural expression. They have uncovered the inherent divinity and spirituality of human existence. The ancestors provide the ethics and worldview by which adherents to the culture must abide by for the development of the self and culture. Ways of behavior to ensure a good life are primarily ancestral statements. It is a good life which leads to a good death. A death which leads beyond the gate and is life everlasting. The Alaashe provide examples of right living as handed down by Yoruba ancestors.

1) Ifarabale: Composure
2) Owo: Respect
3) Suuru: Patience
4) Eso: Caution
5) Imo: Knowledge
6) Ogbon: Wisdom
7) Oye: Understanding

The Development of Self-Yoruba Philosophy

The Thirteen Guidelines for Yoruba Self-Development have also been handed down by Yoruba ancestors to further enhance right living. They are as follows:

1) There is to be **No Practice of Wickedness.**
"Those who sow the seeds of wickedness plant them upon the heads of their children."
"Verily, ashes fly back into the face of he who throws them."

2) There is to be **No Stealing.**
"Even if Man does not see; Oludumare sees."
3) There is to be **No Selfishness.**
"Those who are selfish will come to bare their loads alone."
4) There is to be **No Covenant Breaking Nor Falsehood.**
"The covenant breakers will be carried away by the Earth."
"The sacrifices of covenant breakers and liars are not accepted."
"Do not lie against companions. Do not break a covenant with an associate. Such acts verify bring about our sleeping."
5) There is to be **No Hypocrisy.**
6) There is to be **No Acts of Atrocity** committed against one's neighbors.
7) There is to be **Honor and Respect to the Elders.**
"The relationship of service between Elders and Youth is to be strengthened continuously."
"The hand of the young does not reach the high shelf. That of the Elder does not go into the gourd."
8) There is to be **Protection of the Women.**
"Women are the flowers of the garden; Men are the fence around them."
9) There is to be **Truthfulness and Uprighteousness.**
"Those who are truthful and upright have the blessings of the divinities."
10) There is to be **Kindness and Generosity.**
"Kindness begets Kindness."
11) There is to be **Sensitivity** in respect to person-to-person relationships.
12) There is to be **Chastity** in respect to vows of mates.
"Man, do not seduce another man's wife; Woman, do not seduce another woman's husband."
13) There is to be **Hospitable Directives.**[13]

[13] Adapted from Bolaji Idowu's *Oludumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1961).

It is stated by Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi I, King of the Yoruba in North America that, "The egun [ancestors] are the determiners of what is moral and truthful in respect to life. The orisha do not dictate morality, the ancestors do." The "good life" is established by being respectful to the elders/ancestors. Their wisdom and life directives need to be studied and adhered to. By following proverbial wisdom, insight, and listening to ancestral voices, Yoruba devotees are led to inner strengths and worldly balance. It must not be forgotten that the tenets of Ifa itself are ancestral understandings and interpretations. The very culture is built upon this.

"The ancestors are people who have distinguished themselves on the moral plane. They, are therefore accorded great respect and are held up as models for the living to emulate. They act as a spur to good conduct and the living in turn honor them by offering libations as well as naming their children after them."[14] ". . . the ancestors are not worshipped in the way West Africans worship God. They are not the final authority in all matters, nor are they given the same attributes as the Creator. They are, however, revered, honored, and respected, not as gods, but as spirits and predecessors . . . who are next to the Creator."[15]

The area of reincarnation is seen as an extension of the ancestral being. The Yoruba word *tunde* reflects this. Babatunde (father returns), Iyatunde (mother returns) are examples of the recognition of the spiritual essence which in part brings itself back. The greater importance appears not to be so much on the plane of souls reliving on and on through karmic planes, but on the constant reliving of morals and values. Ironically, to the Yoruba, the returning or reincarnating of the ancestral soul is desired. One strives to live righteously so that they may return from heaven to earth. By returning to the earth, good ancestral souls

[14] Kofi Opoku, West African Traditional Religion (FEP International Private Limited, 1978), p. 53.
[15] West African Traditional Religion, p. 53.

strengthen the lives and the spirits of their surviving descendants.

The Yoruba maintain that the soul of a deceased person either journeys to *orun rere* (good heaven), or *orun apadi/orun buruku* (bad heaven). Souls that are taken before their time become ghosts upon the earth until Olorun comes and delivers them to Orun. The realization of an afterlife is as foremost in Yoruba religion as any other. It has already been noted that the living of a good life is brought about by revering and emulating the ancestors. This life on earth does determine life beyond death.

The understanding held by Yoruba priests is that the human being contains a number of souls. And, that upon death, these souls are released and are each placed in the heavens or the earth according to the person's life and deepness of wisdom. It has been said by the elders that, "death to those who die knowing is not like death to those who die unknowing." Those who have lived a cruel and abusive life go to the place where their souls can never be restored. They can never again return to the living. People who commit suicide also fall into this category.

The structuring of the individual according to the Yoruba ancestors is totally intertwined with the structuring of the community or tribal nation. The tribe or band becomes the focal point of identification. It provides the individual with a center for her or his sense of belonging, education in the ways of the world, and methods for transcendence beyond the worlds. (See figure 18 on p. 78.)

Each stage of the life cycle is complete with ritual and religious ceremony as the core, and social developmental directives as the outer expression. For the individual to be considered as part of the tribal nation they must be initiated into it even though they are physically born into it. Through initiation the candidate passes beyond the natural mode and gains access to the cultural mode—that is they are introduced to spiritual values. In the Yoruba culture those who are uninitiated do not have the full blessings of

the ancestors nor the tribe. The term for these persons is *ologberi*.

Those who are initiated may grow to attain greater position and status within the family and the community. The *olori ebi* is the head of the extended family. She or he is responsible for rituals and judgments regarding the family. The *oba, baale, oloja* is the chief of the town or village. The *aworo* constitute the priestly order. The *elegun* are the mediums. The *oloogun* are the medicine (holy) persons. These positions provide but a simplistic view of the multiplicity of strata that are a Yoruba community.

Yoruba social expression allows for polygamy, which is the marital condition whereby a man may have more than

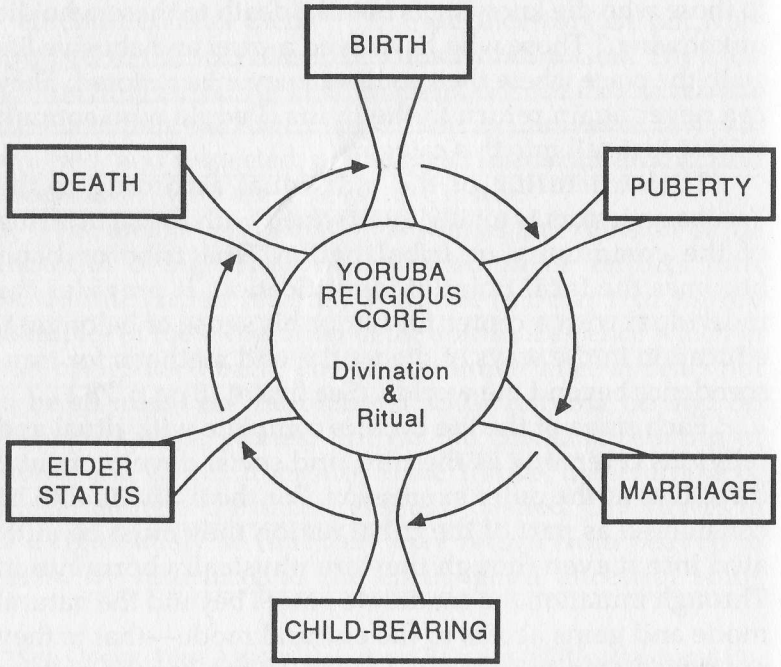


Figure 18. Traditional Life-Stages of the Yoruba culture.

one wife. The key word here is *marital*. The man and the women involved are ritually embraced by both religious and social mores. They combine to form a productive unit geared toward interrelationship, child care, business profit, and communal stability. The wives consider themselves co-wives with the emphasis on cooperation. The dynamics of polygamy are many yet, for centuries upon centuries Yoruba (as well as other world traditions) have continued to evolve both religiously and worldly.

Yoruba religious expression also allows for those of the priestly orders to be married and raise children. Outside of specific sacred commitments priests and priestesses are encouraged to marry. Orunmila, the prophet, was married to a number of wives and sired many children. The statement is clear that in respect to the ancestral way, male and female forces must be approached and balanced in order to create a stable person, a stable family, community, and nation.

The creation of *egbe* or specific societies are also an integral part of Yoruba communal functioning. The primary *egbe* are the:

1) Ogboni/Osugbo Society who reflect the balancing of male and female forces in human construct and universal design. The Ogboni are headed by elders who revere the Earth-Mother and strive to protect and uphold her purity. These elders are set to carry on the traditions of the ancestors. They also pass judgment on those who defy the traditional laws. Members are initiated into the society.

2) Egungun Society is devoted to the Earth, but more so with the deceased who are buried in it. Those of the Egungun Society are mediums who have the ability to possess the spirit of those departed. They then communicate the desires and last messages to the family. The Egungun are known for their enormous masks and raffia dress with attached cloth covering their entire body.

3) Gelede Society are devoted to Yemoja. Their function is to bring about harmonious reconciliation between humans and the witches (*aje*). The Gelede cult wear masks with tribal markings and dress in padded clothing (representing the fullness of Yemoja). They invoke the witches and sacrifice to them in order to neutralize their powerful negativity and destructive potential.

Chapter 4

DIVINATION, SACRIFICE, INITIATIONS

AT THE VERY CENTER of the Yoruba religious practice and character development lays divination. As discussed in Chapter 2 divination is perceived as that mystic state of communing with the divinities as revealed by Orunmila, the Prophet. Every branch of Yoruba in the New World respects the various forms of divination born from the Ifa corpus. Babalawo (high priest), babalorisha (male priests), Iyalorisha (priestesses), and to some degree aborisha (Yoruba devotees who are not yet of the priestly order) all utilize divination in order to:

1) seek the scriptual messages of Ifa;

2) to inquire as to what offerings are expected by the orisha;

3) to inquire if the offerings are accepted by the orisha.

Divination implements differ at each level of the priesthood, yet all implements may be applied for revelations and inquiries to the divinities. The high priest utilizes the ikin (palm nuts) and opon-Ifa (divining board); and/or the opele (divining chain). The o'lorisha (priest/priestesses) utilize the merindilogun (sixteen cowrie shells). The aborisha begin with the obi and obi abata for the fundamental practice of divination. However, the obi and obi abata are also used by all levels of the priestly orders.

Obi Shell Patterns

The obi abata is actually the name of the Nigerian kola nut. The kola nuts are split into four quarters showing two male (ako meji) and two female (abo meji) sides. Yoruba diviners notate and interpret the quarters based on how they fall when cast. In the New World obi abata have been replaced by four pieces of a coconut shell with a cowrie attached to each piece.[1] Two males (shells that show the bulb side) and two females (shells that show the ridges) are cast. Divination is then completed in the same manner as the Nigerian-Old World (as seen in table 7).

The more general use of the obi abata is to ask yes or no questions either of the orisha, the ancestors, or the ori of the seeker. The Obi are also used to determine if an offering is acceptable to the orisha. The obi are cast and may land either face up (O) or face down (●).

Prior to actually casting the obi, water is sprinkled on them by the devotee. The devotee prays to the obi, saying:

ago obi, ago obi, ago obi
(listen obi)
obi ni ibi iku
(the obi averts death)
obi ni ibi orun
(the obi averts sickness)
obi ni ibi ofo
(the obi averts loss)
obi ni ibi fitibo
(the obi averts being overwhelmed)
obi ni ibi idina
(the obi averts obstacles)

[1] Agbon is the Yoruba term for coconut, yet when used for religious purposes in the New World, the term obi is applied. This reflects the transferences of usage, not a misnaming of object.

In reference to the orisha approached either at the ojubo-shrine, or at the natural environment or sacred place, a prayer is also made. The devotee holds the obi in the left hand and with the right hand she/he knocks upon the floor or ground three times and incants:

Ile mo ki e o, Ile mo ki e o, Ile mo ki e o.
(Shrine I greet you.)

The obi are then placed in the right hand and with the left hand knocking the devotee incants:

Ile mo ki e o iki eye. Ile mo ki e o iki eye. Ile mo ki e o iki eye.
(Shrine I greet you with honor.)

The obi are returned back to the left hand and with the right hand knocking the devotee incants:

Obi (the name of Orisha or Egun) Ile mo ki e o iki eye.
(Obi _____ I greet you with honor)
(Repeat three times.)

Table 7. The Patterns of an Obi Cast.

OBI	PATTERN	MEANING
Alafia	OOOO	Yes
Etawa*	OOO●	Perhaps
Ejife	OO●●	Definitely
Okana	O●●●	No
Oyeku	●●●●	No

* NOTE: When Etawa appears, cast again then make the determination based thereon. If Etawa appears on the second cast also, the answer is yes. Etawa implies struggle, or not giving oneself enough Ashe.

Table 7 shows the various patterns which the Obi can fall when cast and how to interpret them. If the obi fall in patterns indicating a yes response, then not much more needs to be done. If the fall indicates a no response, then the priest or devotee must continue to state other offerings. After each statement the shells are cast again. This process is repeated until a yes pattern appears. In this manner, it is determined if offerings have been accepted or if the intent or desire of the devotee is acceptable to the orisha or egun.

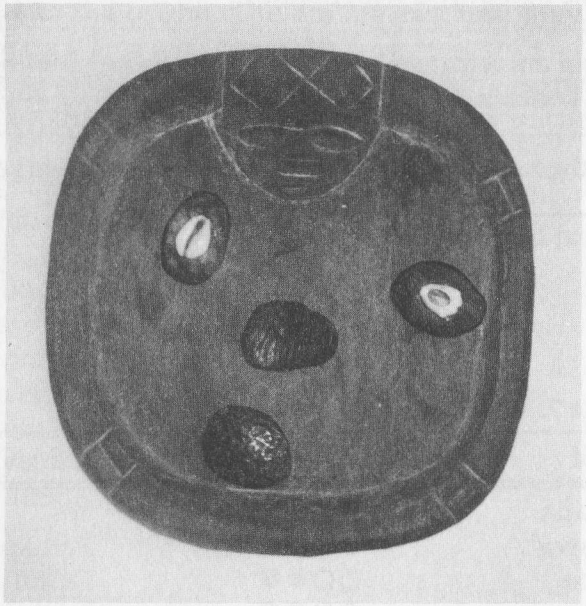


Figure 19. The obi cast shows Ejife (a definite yes) to a question asked to the orisha. The only consideration here is whether the shells face up or down. Male and female cowries are not taken into account.

Ifa Revelations

Divination that focuses more on the revelations of Ifa are divided into four dimensions. These dimensions are studied by the priestly. The dimensions of divination are integral parts of each other. They may be developed and expounded upon separately, yet in actual practice, they overlap and blend into a oneness which is the foundation of divination. The four dimensions are supported by four steps which are the processes of:

1) Divination: the casting of obi, merindilogun, opele, or ikin.

2) Notation: in writing, speech, or mind, the recording of the number and/or patterns. In Yoruba proper—the Odu.

3) Interpretation: use of proverbs, stories, experiences, etc., which are based upon the odu cast and noted. As such, the diviner gives the seeker the nature of his or her concerns as well as supporting psychological and spiritual insights and directives.

4) Application: based upon all of the above, this is what the seeker is to do. This may be as involved as complex cleansing rituals, or as simple as wearing a particular color. Application, in a sense, has at heart the offering of one's self-energies to the Orisha and or Egun for the elevation, the spirit, and the aversion of the dangers in one's life.

Before the Obi Abata are cast mojubar is offered (see page 64). The devotee now places the shells or the actual split kola-nuts (obi abata) into her/his hands. Upon gently shaking them the devotee chants:

> Akinmoran, Akinmoran, Akinmoran
> (may the divine spirit in heaven assist the divine spirit on earth).

The devotee then exhales on the shells three times and places them (still cupped in her/his hands) to forehead. Now, with the words "dida obi" (cast obi for) the name of seeker is said and the shells are released on the kekere-opon (little divining tray), ate (mat), or white cloth. The character is determined and the counseling begins. To determine the character is the first degree of interpretation. See Table 8.

The direction of the shells are the next degree of interpreting that the novice must study. If the shell closest to the top is male and points to the right or topward, then the interpretation of the situation is positive. If the male shell points to the left or toward the bottom, then a negative interpretation is made. If the shell closest to the top is female and points to the right or bottom, then a positive interpretation is made. If the female shell points to the left or toward the top then a negative interpretation is made. In

Table 8. Obi Abata Interpretations.

CHARACTERS	OBI ABATA	DIRECTIVE
Ilera	1 Male shell	Health; Status
Aje	1 Female shell	Finance; Material & Money
Ejire	1 Male & 1 Female shell	Friendships; Relationships
Ero	2 Female shells	Love; Marriage
Akoran	2 Male shells	Stability; Peaceful Development; Upliftment
Akita	2 Male and 1 Female	Success after hardship; Controversy
Obita	2 Female and 1 Male	Home situation and environment
Ogbe	All shells up	Justice; Righteousness
Oyeku	No shells up	Transformation; Rebirth

Note: The direction in which the shell(s) point is also of great importance.

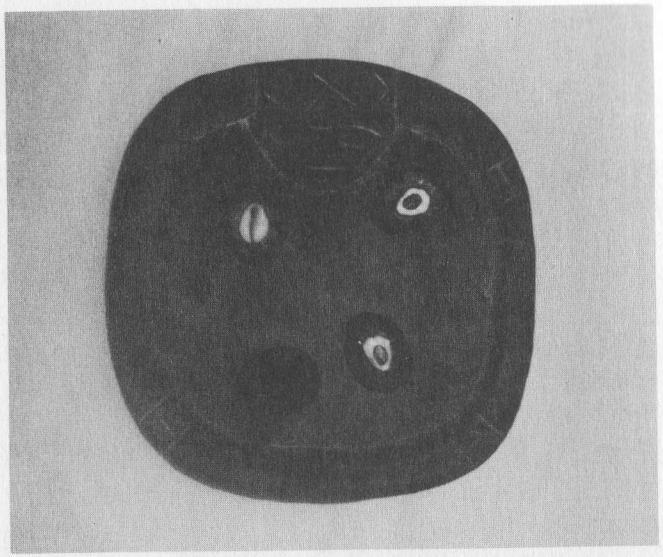


Figure 20. The Obi Abata cast on the kekere opon (little divining tray). The character depicted is Akita—two males and one female. The Odu is Ogunda, as noted from the way the shells have fallen from the top to the bottom of the opon.

either case the healing messages of the diviner must lend to the elevation of those seeking assistance.

The third degree of interpreting the Obi Abata is to determine the odu by the concave and convex fall of the shells from the top of the opon to the bottom. The concave is open and is marked as I (light). The convex is closed and is marked as II (dark). (See figure 2 on page 12 for the 16 major odu.) The patterns are those of the opele as examined in chapter 1 (Ifa Corpus) and the odu may be examined as done by a babalawo. Only the initiated need work to this degree as sacrifices are necessary.

The merindilogun, or sixteen cowries, represent the third level of Ifa divination. They are only to be utilized by the priest/priestess of the orisha order. The sixteen cowries are part of the consecrated religious objects obtained when

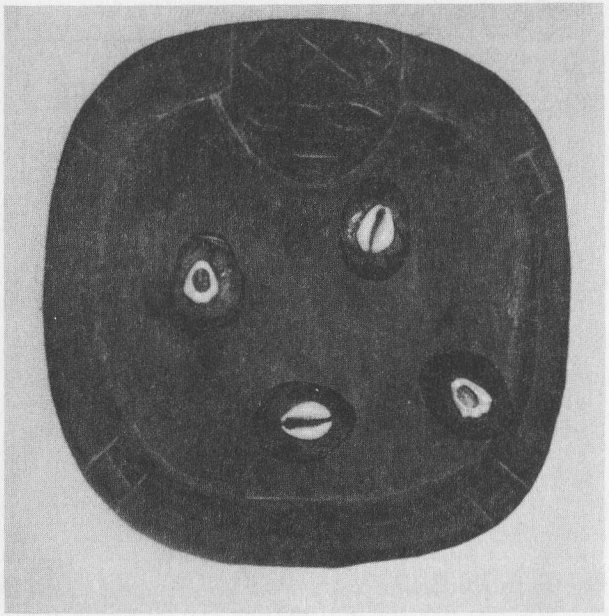


Figure 21. An Obi abata cast depicting the character Ogbe (all light) as noted from the way the shells have fallen from the top to the bottom of the opon.

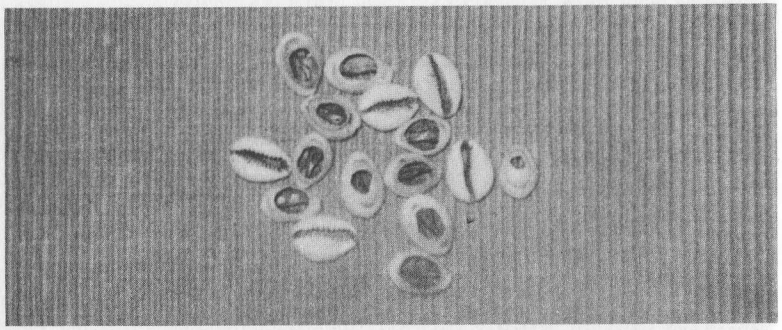


Figure 22. The merindilogun (sixteen cowries) used for the divination by the priests of the Yoruba religion. The cast depicts Oshe (five elders).

an aborisha is initiated into the sacerdotal order. They are not be used by the uninitiated.

Once this level of Ifa divination is attained, the ashe of the odu, the orisha, and all the spiritual forces of the Yoruba planes of realization become actual. The process of learning and fortifying the initiate is the responsibility of the god-parent (priestly mentor). Nowhere in Yorubaland are the odu approached lightly. And, as the merindilogun reflect the odu, nowhere are they taken lightly. The reasons for providing the divine expressions of the shells are to:

1) elevate the respect level for them as to what they represent;

2) erase the ignorance of so many devotees who are literally being taken advantage of due to their lack of knowledge;

3) stimulate interest in devotees so that they further investigate Yoruba priestly orders intelligently and spiritually.

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The forces of heaven (orun) and earth (aye) are unfolded through the odu. The diviner must prepare for the immersion into Ifa realms. The mojubar is given; prayers are said (particularly to the orisha of the shells being used). The shells are rubbed between the diviner's hands as prayers for the seeker are offered. The shells are then placed in a sacred bowl and presented to the seeker who exhales on them three times. The diviner then touches the forehead of the seeker with the shells (enclosed in his/her hands) and the cast is made with the words, "difa fun" (cast Ifa for) the name of the seeker. Then a second cast is made so that a double odu results. The first is dominant, the second is the balancing factor. How the shells fall in respect to the female sides showing, or shells up, determines the odu. Table 9 presents the merindilogun. The order of the odu is different

for the o'lorisha than for the babalawo as cited on page 14. Although they are interpreted basically the same, the babalawo has deeper insights and revelations.

Table 9. The Merindilogun Cast and their Order.*

OKANRAN	1 shell up
OYEKU	2 shells up
OGUNDA	3 shells up
IROSUN	4 shells up
OSHE	5 shells up
OBARA	6 shells up
ODI	7 shells up
OGBE	8 shells up
OSA	9 shells up
OFUN	10 shells up
OWORIN	11 shells up
OTURUPON	12 shells up
IKA	13 shells up
IWORI	14 shells up
OTURA	15 shells up
IRETE	16 shells up
OPIRA	No shells up

*The merindilogun are cast twice. If the same odu appears on the second cast the term meji is added. For example, okanran cast twice is okanran meji. If the second cast is different than the first then the odu is called accordingly. For example, if the first cast is okanran, and the second otura, the cast is called okanran-otura.

The Ikin and the Opele

The ikin and the opele are the fourth level reflections of the divine odu. This is the level of the odu as interpreted by the high priest of the Yoruba tradition. The high priest is known as Ifa priest or babalawo (father of mysteries). Only he is permitted to use the ikin (sacred palm nuts) and the opele (divining chain) for the purpose of divination. The ikin are deemed sacred because of Orunmila. He ordained that they would be the symbolic objects representing his divine being on earth. The ikin, as with the later developed opele, are presented to the babalawo apprentice after they have completed their actual initiation.

Divination on this level yields the greatest insight into the cosmic intelligence and spirit-energy of the odu. This insight yields the deepest of understandings and interpretation of the odu and the divinities who exist within them. By "pounding" the ikin or casting the opele, the diviner is able to determine the odu which, in the mystic sense, calls down the heavenly entity. The babalawo must be able to recall and recite messages pertinent to the seeker's situation. He must also be able to devise and develop workable and applicable ways for the seeker to be elevated through or by means of sacrifice (ebo). For these reasons the babalawo is the final mortal messenger. Priest and priestesses of the orisha consult the babalawo in times of difficulties and to attain greater insight into the religion. Members of the Yoruba tradition view the babalawo as the epitome of cultural maintainers and the guides to inner awareness, spiritual elevation, and soul salvation.

Before the cast is made the babalawo prepares himself through prayers to Orunmila, chants and contemplation. Prayers for the seeker follow. The babalawo then takes the divining implements and presents them to the seeker. The seeker exhales upon the ikin or opele three times. The exhalation is done so that the emi or inner spirit may acti-

vate the divining apparatus to focus on the seeker specific. This is often done but not always. The purity and strength of the babalawo is more usually the greater of factors.

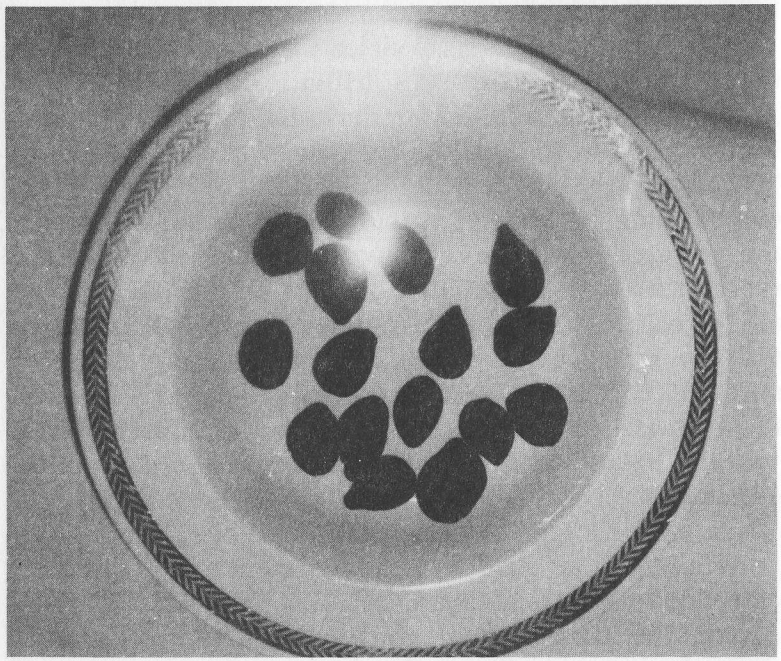

Figure 23. The sacred palm nuts of Orunmila (ikin) presented to the babalawo for prayer and divination. The ikin are also presented to devotees receiving the one hand of Orunmila. They are only used for the purpose of prayer in this instance.

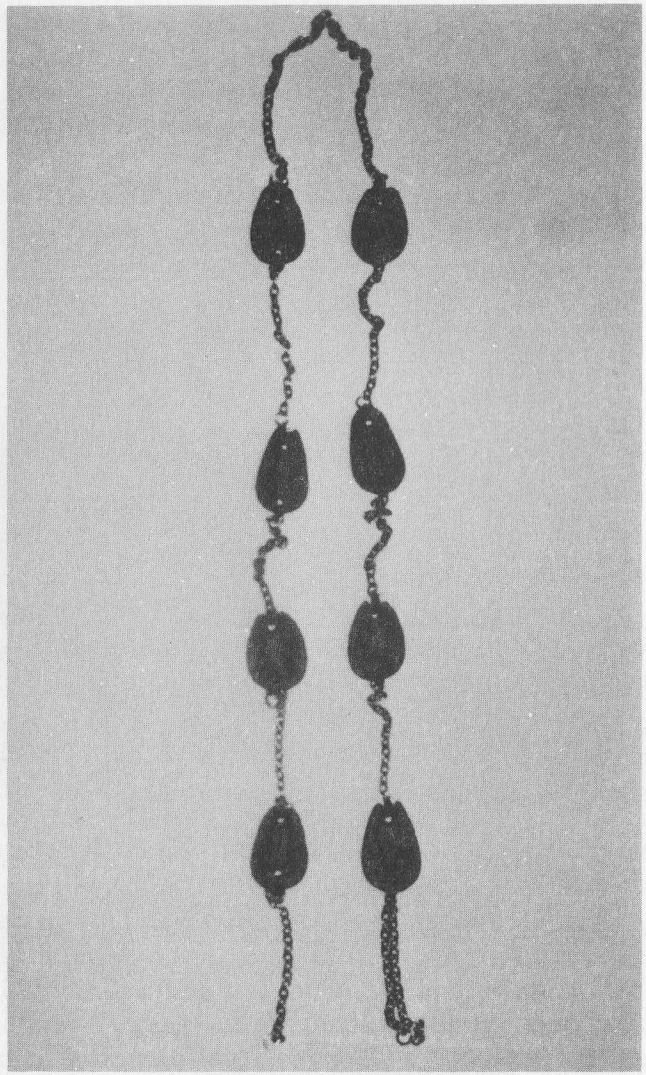

Figure 24. The opele of the babalawo. The casting of the opele shows the odu which is interpreted by the babalawo. This cast is Oworin Osa as stated from left to right.

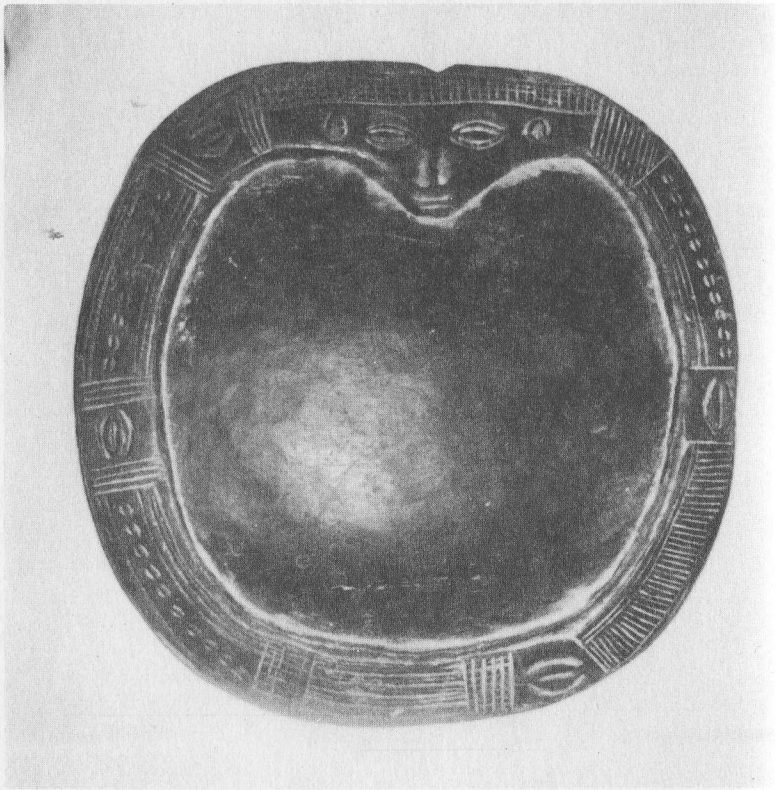

Figure 25. The Opon-Ifa (divination tray) of the babalawo. The tray symbolizes the universe and the inherent truths to be found within it. The babalawo marks the odu on the powder (iyersoun) which is spread on the Opon-Ifa. The face at the top always represents Eshu.

Ebo: Offerings and Sacrifices

It has been stated throughout the previous chapters that offerings and sacrifices are presented to the orisha (and also the egun). In Yoruba terms this is called ebo, which may be divided into two categories:

1) *Ebo*: The offerings of sacrificial animals to the orisha; the offering of any plant or object that has been first utilized to spiritually cleanse oneself (as in baths, rubbing fruit over the body, etc.); and offerings that involve the work of the devotee such as cooking food and carving statues.

2) *Adimu*: The offering of clothes, plants, and fruits; cooked or uncooked foods; and tangible objects to the Orisha not prepared or carved by the devotee.

Divination by one's priest or priestess determines the type of ebo or adimu that is prescribed. Yoruba practitioners rarely go about invoking the deities or presenting sacrificial offerings to them without first consulting the diviners. Ebo is prescribed, in one form or another, whenever Ifa is consulted. This is because of the Yoruba belief in the "reciprocity of ashe." The heavenly forces are reverently invoked and prayed to and are expected to respond to the devout, granting their supplications and providing protection from malevolent forces. In return, the devout are expected to replenish the ashe through animal sacrifice and offerings. Many times greater devotion and the sincere effort to change their wayward character are also expected.

Human cultures have always practiced multiple forms of sacrifice for religious purposes. Although the forms may be questioned, the purpose remains the same. The human attempt to reach the divinity through themselves and their world. What continues to be misunderstood is that sacrifice—in the physical or spiritual sense—is an active proponent of all religious involvement.

The most ancient builders of nations such as the Khametans of Africa, the peoples of India and China, and other Far Eastern countries all have religious accounts of blood sacrifice and prescribed offerings to the deities of their culture. Near Eastern countries, such as Israel, Jordan, and others have lent us the Biblical Testaments which give credence to blood sacrifice—especially for the atonement of sins. Native Americans sacrificed to their cultural deities as studies of the Aztecs so clearly reveal. Tribal nations across the North and South American continent sacrificed to earth and sky deities. Europeans also practiced the way of sacrifice. For example, in Homer's *Odyssey* it is said that Odysseus made sacrifice of sheep for the dead (Homer, *Odyssey*, XI, 18–50). The ancient Greeks, Romans, and tribal nations of European origin made continual offerings and sacrifices to their gods.[2]

Reasons why sacrifices are offered:

a) To give thanks for the granting of a need or desire.

b) As a promise or sacred vow made to the deity.

c) To prevent the cause of suffering.

d) To remove the cause of suffering.

e) As a way of substituting the sacrificial animal for the devotee.

f) To provide strength, stability, and courage to achieve in the visible world, as well as the invisible world.

[2] Mircae Eliade, *From Primitive to Zen* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

The sacred act of sacrifice, or "making ebo" is comprised of four parts:

1) The priest presents the devotee and the ebo to the holy symbol representing the deity.

2) Prayers over the devotee and to the ebo are made to consecrate them.

3) The deity is invoked to participate and receive the sacrifice.

4) The offering is placed at the shrine of the deity. The blood is let upon the religious object as prayers are said.

Sacrifice, however, is only one aspect in the complexity of ritual. Prayer, dance, symbolic gestures, personal and communal elevation are all active elements in sacrificial ritual. These elements are combined to "call down" the orisha in Yoruba practice. Novices must not be misled into believing the "making ebo" is the highest form of sacrifice—one that will make everything right in a world gone wrong. To make ebo is to open the opportunity for positive change—to enhance the possibility of growth. The human factor must not be overlooked. The greatest sacrifice is the human sacrifice—the sacrificing of negative thoughts and destructive tendencies; the sacrifice of the lower based self for the divine principle of being. All other sacrifices are intended to enhance this human endeavor.

The types of Ebo or Offerings presented to the Egun and/or Orisha are:

- spiritual baths;
- medicinal herbs;
- prayers and meditation;
- offerings of fruit, flowers, tobacco, cloth, or foods of the Orisha;

Table 10. Offering to the Orishas.

ORISHA	SACRIFICIAL OFFERINGS
Obatala	White fruits; Coconut; White kola nuts; Efun; White yams; Snails; Snail water; Shea butter; Rice; Hens; Pigeons; Female goats.
Elegba	Palm oil; Tobacco; All fruits/nuts; Roasted corn; Coconut; Roosters; Male goats; Yams.
Oshun	Honey; Cinnamon; Pumpkin; Lettuce; Oranges; Eggs; Guinea-hens; Hens; Sheep.
Yemoja	Molasses; Seafoods; Ducks; Hens (or Roosters)
Ogun	Palm wine; Rum; Palm oil; Pineapple/fruits; Roasted corn; Tobacco; Roosters; Male goats; Yams.
Oya	Rum; Red wine; Eggplant; Rice and beans; Plums; Tobacco; Purple grapes; Hens (or Roosters); Female goats; Plantains.
Shango	Plantain; Yams; Okra; Green bananas; Tobacco; Rum; Bitter kola nuts; Rams; Roosters (red).

Table 11. Objects Associated with Each Orisha.

ORISHA	OBJECTS
Obatala	Elephants, white birds, statues of elder African men dressed in white; images of mountains; white cloth
Elegba	Statues of male figures with an erect penis and/or long-braided hair; rocks; coconuts
Oshun	Fertility artifacts; objects of brass or gold; peacock feathers; mirrors; fans; fine jewelry; cowrie shells
Yemoja	Strong matriarchal statues; creatures of the sea; shells from the sea; images of the sea
Ogun	Machetes; all iron objects; statues of hunters and warriors; blacksmiths; vehicles of iron or metal
Oya	Buffalo horns; grotesque masks; multi-colored cloth; images of storms
Shango	Double ax (oshe Shango); black cats; ram heads; drums; stones; trees struck by lightning; horses; turtles

- socially charitable acts;
- fruit and flower cleansings;
- incense and oils;
- self-reflective directives;
- blood sacrifices;
- altars and shrines;
- stronger religious involvement;
- song and dance;
- flaws of character.

Table 10 gives examples of the various foods and animals which may be offered to the specific Orisha. Remember, ebo is done under the guidance of the priests. It is strongly advised that no invocation or offering be made without their knowledge or approval. See Tables 10 and 11 for information about offerings and objects associated with the oriska.

Initiation into the Priestly Realms

"Being a priest/priestess involves the merging of one's personality into a much bigger whole. Humility, subjugation to orisha and to the discipline ritual are essential qualities for a priest to achieve. So, for the orisha priest, modesty and complete lack of selfishness are pre-requisites of wisdom." Yoruba Priestly Wisdom.

The process of becoming a Yoruba priest is defined by marked stages of ritual ceremony along with related teachings. Novices embarking on this journey must first find a babalawo (high-priest) or o'lorisha (priest/priestess) who will provide them with the nurturing and patience so strongly needed. There should be relatively little conflict or "bad vibrations" between novice and priest/priestess. The two must work harmoniously to achieve the goal and objective, which is to develop the novice to the point of priestly insight, understanding, and ability.

Not all people who involve themselves in orisha practice need to become initiated into the priestly order. Many find solace in achieving any one of the various stages available to them. Yoruba provides, in New World practice, a number of levels of achievement. The following reflects five of these levels. They are by no means the only stages, but they are the foremost ones.

1. Receiving the Ilekes: Ilekes are the religious beads that mark the first level of actual commitment made by the novice. Five ilekes are presented ceremoniously to the initiate. Each ileke represents an orisha: white—Obatala; black and red—Elegba; yellow—Oshun; blue—Yemoja; red and white—Shango. The ilekes are consecrated by the presiding priest/priestess. Ewe (herbs), ebo (sacrificial blood), and efun (sacred earth) are made into a solution (omiero). The ilekes are washed in the solution and are now consecrated and have the ashe, which will empower the devotee with the essence of the orisha.

2. Receiving the Ajagun: The word ajagun is Yoruba for warriors. The ajagun are comprised of Elegba, Ogun, Oshoosi, and Osun. Their function is to protect the aborisha from destruction by opposing spiritual forces (ajogun) and opposing people (omo-aiye). In no way should this be interpreted as sorcery or witchcraft. All religious systems provide their believers with protectors against the demonic. Yoruba is no different.

Those temples which express love and light infuse that energy into the ashe of the consecrated ajagun. In doing so, protection is a worthy response of the angelic. Hence, there is little to fear from "negative forces." Those temples that express conflict and confusion lend this energy to the ashe of the ajagun and the perpetuation of that energy.

3. The One Hand of Orunmila—Onifa: This ceremonial ritual involves the initiate more so with the ashe of Orunmila and the odu. Devotees receive the consecrated objects of Orunmila: the ikin (sacred palm nuts); the agere (the container for the ikin; a yellow and green ileke; and the ide (religious beads formed as a wristlet). The ide is worn on the left wrist and is Orunmila's symbol to Iku (death) that the devotee is a "child of the prophet" and should not be taken before their time. The babalawo utilizes his ikin to determine the odu, which the heavenly disciples present to guide the initiate to sacredness and divine wisdom. The initiate is instructed on how to pray with the ikin and how to call upon her/his odu for worldly assistance and spiritual elevation. Only the babalawo can preside over this ritual.

4. Priesthood—Elehan: At this stage the initiate is proclaimed ready to serve as priest/priestess of the religion. They have demonstrated their degree of commitment and have stood the test set upon them by orisha, ancestors, and god-parents alike. There are different reasons why one is called into the priesthood. Some are called for spiritual reasons that involve only themselves and they work very little with others; some are called to be as messengers (Ojise

Figure 26. Akpetebi Olayinka Osunkunle aya Karade holds her tambourine—an object she uses in prayer, ceremony and worship. The Priestess Olayinka is also the daughter of Oshun and an Ifa worshiper (onifa).

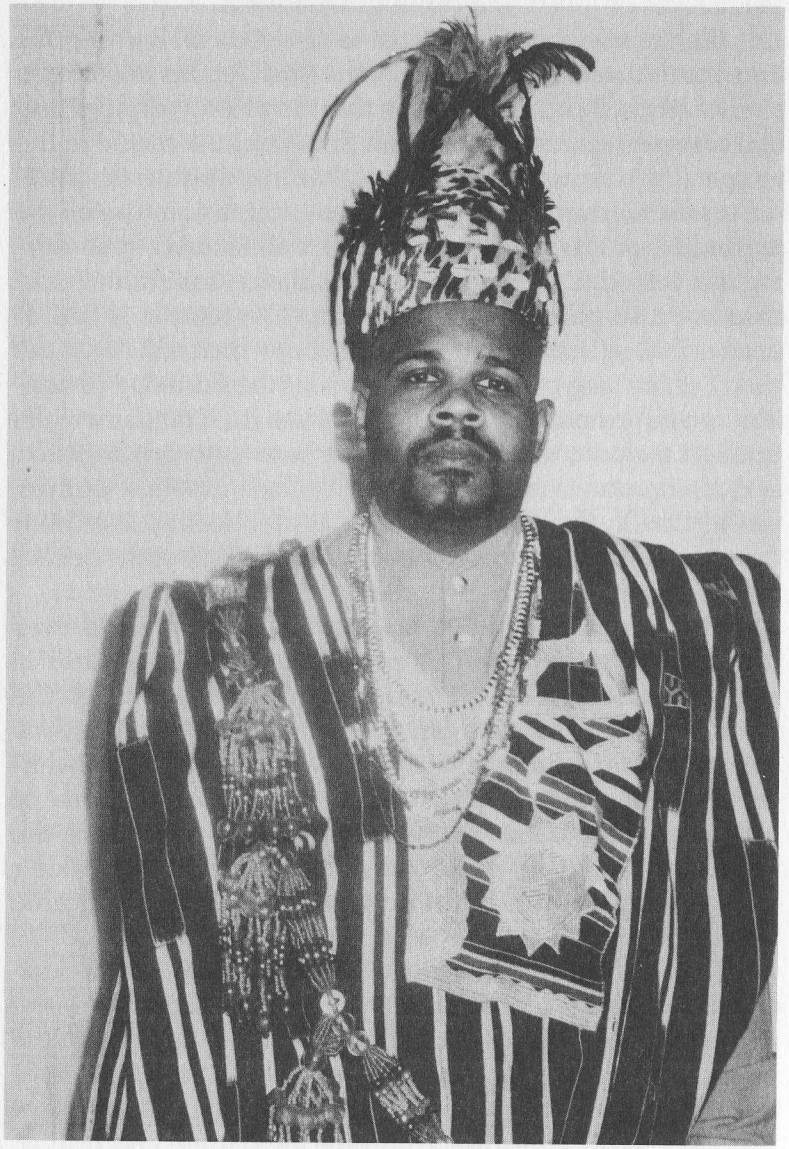

Figure 27. Yoruba Priest of Oshoosi in full regalia. This babalorisha is currently studying Ifa as a babalawo apprentice.

Olorun); others are called to serve the orisha in order to save themselves or loved ones from grave illness.

Elehan may last from three to seven days. During this time the initiate (iyawo—bride of the orisha) is set to undergo a series of trials and teachings so that the priestly abilities and understandings are crystallized. She/he must reside in the temple (ile) during the entire time. Fasting, abstinence, internal study, learning about the orisha, divination (use of the merindilogun), and daily sacrifices are all focused upon during this period. Drumming, religious dance, communal worship are also parts of the initiation. The temple is full of images that reflect the orisha (ere orisha) which will "own the head" of the new o'lorisha. On or about the third day divination is performed. This is the day of the ita. The ita reveals, through the odu, the messages to be seriously contemplated and acted upon by the new priest for the entire time of their priestly involvement. The period of apprenticeship lasts from three months to one year depending on the will of the orisha, as determined through divination.

Only those who have made elehan can preside over those making elehan. The presiding priest/priestess is responsible for the development of the initiate through the period of elehan, or to a greater degree, when the iyawo is able to establish and maintain their own temple and god-children. Another priest/priestess is deemed the ajubona or instructor. The ajubona has the responsibility of teaching the iyawo the constructs of the Yoruba religion and of breaking down the revelations of the god-parent to more applicable workings.

On the final day of elehan the iyawo receives the oduorisha, which is a wooden or clay container holding the ashe of the specific orisha. Inside, the ashe is symbolized by the religious objects consecrated to the orisha. The objects have been consecrated by means of herbal washings, blood sacrifice, cleansing by incense, fruit offerings, song, and prayer. The New World directive is to present the "crown orisha" along with four others of the set. For example, if the aborisha making elehan is to be a priestess of Oshun, she would also receive Elegba, Obatala, Shango, and Yemoja. The elder Yoruba directive is to present only that orisha who is the "crown orisha" of the initiate. No other orisha are received during elehan unless so determined through divination.

The function of the initiation rituals are to make the orisha essence stronger within the devotee. The more rituals that are done, the more this essence is solidified and actualized. The essence then impacts upon the being of the devotee who now becomes an active element of it within the family, community, nation, and world. Those who pass through the various levels must intensify their lives through constant prayer, devotion, and sacrifice to the orisha. Those who become priests must understand their position as seen through the eyes of heaven more so than the eyes of earth. The priestly have the sacred duty to assert and re-assert the divinity of all human beings. That is, they work to elevate the base human nature to divine nature.

5. Babalawo—High Priest: Those who become babalawo are the high-priests in the Yoruba cultural-religion. They are revered for their humility, conviction, faith, honesty and sincerity. Basic and stringent codes of conduct were laid down by Orunmila to the elder Ifa priests to ensure that this order not be corrupted in its ideals. Those priests who do not abide by the code will be punished by Orunmila.

Professor W. Abimbola writes and lectures on the subject of the babalawo. He states that, "The training of the Ifa priest is a supreme example of sacrifice in human endeavor. . . . The aim of the training is to give the priest-in-training a disciplined attitude to the many problems in life. . . . It was therefore the primary aim of the training to prepare him adequately to meet the grave responsibilities of important positions in the community."[3]

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[3] Wande Abimbola, *Ifa: An Exposition of Ifa Literary Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 18.

The initiation into Ifa is only done by male members of the culture. Females have also explored the intense energies which are encountered. Women who have been ordained Iyalawo *must* follow strict rules for admittance. Those infants who are divined to become babalawo begin the actual ritualization at age 7. Older members of the culture may also become initiated if so revealed through Ifa.

Itefa

The ritualization process for babalawo initiation is called Itefa. The process lasts from three to fourteen days and is presided over by a babalawo. The aspirant is shaved of all facial hairs and led to the igbodu (sacred hut built for the ritual). Inside the igbodu the babalawo initiate undergoes the secret trials. Upon its completion, the kekero awo (little-bit babalawo) emerges. He is now ready to:

a) study the Ifa corpus;

b) learn the way of the divination implements;

c) become proficient in the way of sacrifice and ritual;

d) become the epitome of divine nature among the people.

Rituals (Etutu)

"Rituals make us no longer passive beings in the cosmos, but we become creative agents of existence."[4]

[4] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1975), p. 126.

"Rituals generate a sense of certainty and familiarity. They provide continuity among those who perform or attend them. In turn people find a degree of identity through its common observance and experience."[5]

It is important to designate the space and time that rituals are to be performed. To the Yoruba, order is of the utmost significance. The ability to effectively conduct a ritual ceremony is the responsibility of the presiding priest or priestess. They must ensure that all stages are orderly and that transitions from one level to the next are smooth. Supporting temple members ensure that the directives of the presiding o'lorisha or babalawo are carried out effectively.

The ritual is harmonious and creative. There is no need for ill-energy to exist, as this opens the way for negating beings to disrupt the sacred objective. Rituals need not be sterile or done by rote. To create is to recreate the infinite magnitude of nature's expression. The important statement is that the presiding o'lorisha must be sensitive to the spirit of the initiate, and set the initiation or ritual accordingly.

There are rules and guidelines which need be adhered to by the priest and devotee alike:

1) There is to be a period of sexual abstinence (at least 24 hours) before and after the initiation.

2) No over-the-counter prescription drugs are to be taken (unless absolutely necessary for health purposes) on the day of the ritual.

3) Women who are menstruating or pregnant must not participate in rituals that involve blood sacrifice or spiritual possession unless determined by the presiding priest/priestess.

4) There is to be no use of intoxicants or drugs.

[5] *Introduction to African Religion*, p. 126.

5) Novices must bathe and take spiritual baths before the ritual begins.

6) Novices must be well aware of the purpose for the ritual.

7) After the ritual, intiates must find rest and solitude for at least one day.

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As novices begin to seriously contemplate Yoruba as a religion, as a cultural expression, it is important to understand ritualization. All too often the misconception is that academic research and passive involvement are sufficient. That following a course is better than flowing with the essence of worship internalized. The result is the production of a less than open mind and spirit. Rituals performed must serve to open the devotee and make him or her more receptive to the ashe of the teachers, ancestors, and orisha. The ritual is seen as spiritual and is done to bring about the cleansing and heightening of the spirit. In other words, spiritual enlightenment and elevation are the ends to the means of rituals—specifically religious ones.

The spirit is not considered the soul of a person, although the words are often used interchangeably. It is the spirit, once enlightened and elevated, that frees the soul. The spirit is the bonding essence of human nature with divine nature. The soul is the inner flame that exists as a cinder or spark arising from the creative fire. Social rituals, such as marriage, childbirth and funerals appear to be non-religious. However, they are not. The social ritual has, as its core, religious substance. It is a priest or priestess that performs the wedding, the stepping into the world (for infants), and presides over funerals. Although these stages of life may be done without ritual, the results have been catastrophic. Those who adhere to Yoruba need to seriously consider the importance of ritual and the involvement thereof.

Conclusion

The Yoruba religion is a viable and time-honored way of life. Those who seek to change their relationship with themselves, the world, and universal forces may consider Yoruba a possible vehicle. Seekers of the inner self may embrace Yoruba as a source of light, as a source of esoteric teachings. It is important to continually review the contents of this book. Degrees of acceptance and resistance to areas of specific study need to be weighed and discussed, especially those relating to divination, polygamy, ancestor reverence, orisha worship, and Yoruba priesthood.

The true objective of Yoruba religious involvement is to live according to ancestral wisdom and divine righteousness. By embracing the odu of the Yoruba philosophy, you embrace the purity and religiosity of the tradition. By accepting the rituals, initiations, and teachings as your own, you may sense the dawning of their spirit and the emergence of their soul. Follow the true objective. To approach Yoruba from any other place or state of mind is viewed as ungraceful and immature, especially by the elders.

As you study the Yoruba religion, keep in mind that intellect and academia alone are not enough. The student or devotee of Yoruba must also be immersed in ritual, because it is through rituals and initiations that the essence beyond the intellect is awakened. That essence is spirit. The culture of the religion must be accepted, for culture and religion cannot be separated. When you have finished reading, you will need a spiritual guide—a mentor. Yoruba priests and priestesses become "god-father" and "god-mother." They perform the rituals, the intiations, the sacrifices. Their information and insights are invaulable. Please feel to write to me for more information.

Aboru, Aboye, Aboisise
May the offerings be carried;
May the offerings be accepted;
May the offerings set divine forces into motion.

Religious Phrases of the Yoruba

YORUBA	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Ohun ori wa se Ko ma ni s alai se eo	What ori comes to fulfill, It cannot but fulfill it.
Aye l'ajo, orun n'ile	The world is a marketplace. The spirit world is home.
Ohun gbogbo ti a ba se laye la ookunle re lorun	That which we do on earth, we shall account for kneel ing in heaven.
Ebo fin, Eru da	The offerings are accepted, evil forces depart.
Ojo o buru, ebo nii gbe ni o	In days of turbulence, it is ebo that saves.
Ṣ otito ṣ ododo ṣ oora ma ṣ ika	Perform truth, perform righteousness, perform kindness, avoid cruelty.
Ni nyin awon awo, awon awo nyin sa	She/he was praising the diviners, the diviners were praising orisha.
Dide dide lalafia	Arise, arise in peace.
Iṣe Olorun tobi	God's work is great and mighty.
Ka maa worisha	Let us keep looking to the orisha.
Mo fe bo	I want to worship.
Orunmila eleri ipin ibekeji Oludumare	Orunmila, witness of fate second to the Creator.

Religious Phrases of the Yoruba (continued).

B'ao ku ishe o tan	When there is life, there is still hope.
Abo ru, Abo ye, Abo ṣiṣe	Salutation to babalawo by all yoruba traditionalists. (May the offerings be carried, may the offerings be accepted, may the offerings bring about change.)
Bi owe, bi owe, ru Ifa soro	Like proverbs, like proverbs, is how Ifa speaks.
Riru ebo ni i gbe ni airu ki i gbe eyan	It is the offerings of sacrifices that brings blessings. Neglect of sacrifices blesses no one.

Yoruba Vocabulary

A

Aba: the manifestation of ashe into righteous human development.
Aborisha: a devotee of orisha who has received the elekes.
Adie: chicken.
Adimu: Offerings made to one's ancestors and to the orisha.
Adura: prayers.
Agbon: coconut.
Agere: container or vessel which holds the sacred palm nuts (ikin of Orunmila).
Ago: listen.
Aiku: long life.
Aiye: earth.
Ajagun: angelic warriors comprised of Eshu, Ogun, Oshoosi, Osun.
Ajogun: malevolent forces intent on destroying humankind.
Ajubona: religious teacher.
Akpetebi: wife of an Ifa priest (babalawo).
Akuku: rooster.
Alaashe: those who reflect the codes of ancestral conduct.
Alafia: peace.
Ara: body.
Arun: sickness.
Asaro: meditation.
Ashe: essence of primal power and creative potential.
Ate: mat.
Awe: fasting; religious abstinence from food.
Awo: those of the priestly order.
Ayanmo: destiny.

B

Baba: father.
Baba mi: my father.
Babalawo: father of mysteries.
Babalorisha: priest of any one of the various sects of orisha worship.
Babarugbo: old man.
Bata: sacred drums of orisha worship (New World).
Bembe: communal worship as tribute to the Orisha (New World).
Beni: all is well; yes.

C

Candomble: Yoruba religion combined with Catholicism as practiced in South America.

D

Dida obi: cast obi for.
Dide: arise.
Die Die: bit by bit; little by little.
Difa fun: cast Ifa for.
Dojude: darkness.

E

Ebo: animal and plant sacrifices to one's ancestors or to the orisha.
Efun: white chalk-like substance taken from the earth for religious consecration.
Egun: ancestor.
Egungun: society of priests who possess the spirits of the deceased.
Elegun: those who are mounted / possessed by the orisha.
Emi: the spiritual essence of a person's breath or being.
Epo: palm oil.
Eran: meat, animals.

Ere (orisha): religious images, statues, etc., of the orisha.
Ese: verse of the Ifa corpus.
Etutu: ritual.
Ewe: herbs and plants.
Ewo: restriction; taboos.
Ewure: she-goat.
Eyele: pigeon.

F

Fun Fun: white.
Fun: to give.

G

Gbogbo: all.
Gelede: society that reconciles the differences between humans and witches.

I

Ibeji: twins.
Ibi: to avert; aversion of misfortune.
Ifa: the cosmic intelligence of Yoruba cultural expression.
Ifunpa: amulet.
Igbodu: hut constructed during babalawo initiations.
Ijuba: the paying of homage or reverence.
Ikin: sacred palm nuts used by the babalawo in worship and divination.
Ikoode: red parrot feather tied to initates head during ocha.
Iku: death.
Ile: house; temple.
Ilekes: spiritual beads consecrated to the orisha and presented to novices ceremoniously.
Ile-Ife: holy city of the Yoruba religion.
Imo: knowledge.
Imule: oath.
Ire: blessings; good fortune.

Irosun: camwood.
Ita: divination at ocha on the third day.
Itan: historical and mythological narratives described in the Ifa corpus.
Itefa: the ritual ceremony of initiating the Ifa devotee to actual babalawo.
Iwa-pele: balanced character.
Iya: mother.
Iyalorisha: priestess of any one of the various sects of orisha worship.
Iyawo: initiate into the priestly realm - Ocha; (wife of the Orisha).
Iyerosun: special powder used by the babalawo to mark the odu on the Opon-ifa.

J

Jinle: deep (as in thought or expression).

K

Kekere: small, little.
Kiki: moral of a verse or story.

L

Lucumi: Yoruba religion combined with Spanish Catholicism on the island of Cuba.

M

Mariwo: palm fonds.
Meji: two or twice.
Merindilogun: sixteen cowrie shells used by priest and priestesses for Ifa divination.
Modupe: I give thanks.
Mojubar: I give homage.

O

Obuko: he-goat.
O'lorisha: male and female priests.
Oba: chief; king.
Obe: knife.
Obi Abata: actual kola nuts divided in four parts used for divination.
Odabo: good bye.
Odu: sixteen heavenly disciples named by Orunmila as the epitome of Yoruba culture and religion.
Ofo: loss.
Ojuba: sacred shrine room for orisha worship.
Oju odu: the first sixteen odu meji of the babalawo.
Ologberi: the uninitiated.
Oloogun: medicine healers of the Yoruba.
Olori ebi: religious head of the family or social function.
Oludumare/Olorun: God.
Omi: water.
Omiero: herbal solution used for spiritual baths and consecration of religious objects.
Omo: child.
Omo-aiye: malevolent human beings.
Omo odu: the 240 combinations of different odu casts.
Ona: road.
Onifa: worshippers of Ifa (Orunmila).
Onile: Earth goddess.
Onje: food; meals.
Opele: the divining chain of the babalawo.
Opon Ifa: round or rectangular wooden tray used by babalawo to divine.
Oriki: praise songs and chants to the orisha.
Orin: songs to the orisha.
Orisha: angelic emanations of the Creator manifesting through nature.
Orita: crossroads.
Orun: sky; heaven.

Orunmila: The prophet of the Yoruba religion.
Osha: period of time the initiate undergoes priestly development.
Ota: stones as the symbols of immortality.
Oti: strong alcoholic drink.
Owo: money; prosperity.

S

Santeria: Yoruba religion combined with Spanish Catholicism.
Siju: light; open.
Suuru: patience.

T

Tutari: incense.
Tutu: cool.

V

Vodun: West African term meaning God; Yoruba and French Catholicism combined in Haiti.

Y

Yoruba: ethnic group and culture of African origin.

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Resources

If you want to study Yoruba religious teachings and initiations, you may want to contact me about the temple that we have in New Jersey. You can write to me in care of the publisher. You may also want to explore these teachings with other teachers. Each Yoruba Temple will present these teachings in their own way, so if you contact the temples listed below, they may approach the teachings differently than I do. The important factor is the learning and growth that takes place as a result of your involvement. If you sincerely journey forth to find the self, the self will be that which leads you.

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Baba Ifa Karade is a Chief in the Yoruba culture—an Ifa Priest (babalaw and Priest of Obatala (babalorisha). He received his initiations in Ejigb Nigeria, Africa in 1991, culminating an extensive period of study a preparation. In 1992, Baba Ifa returned to Nigeria in order to make his p grimage to the sacred city of Ile-Ife and to continue his development a Yoruba traditionalist.

Baba Ifa Karade is a member of the Ijo Orunmila Igbo Mimo, a s ciety of African American Babalawo and is also a member of the Ogbo Society. He was ordained *Chief Lowo Osi Oba* (the left hand of the king) His Royal Highness, Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi I. As Chief, he has be directed to set as an objective the elevation of Yoruba religiosity and t establishing of a Yoruba based cultural community in the North Easte region of the United States. Presently, Baba Ifa Karade is the spiritu leader of *Ile Tawo Lona* (Temple of the Mystic Path) which he founded the state of New Jersey. He continues to lecture and write newspaper a cles, as well as books and periodicals, on the Yoruba religious experien